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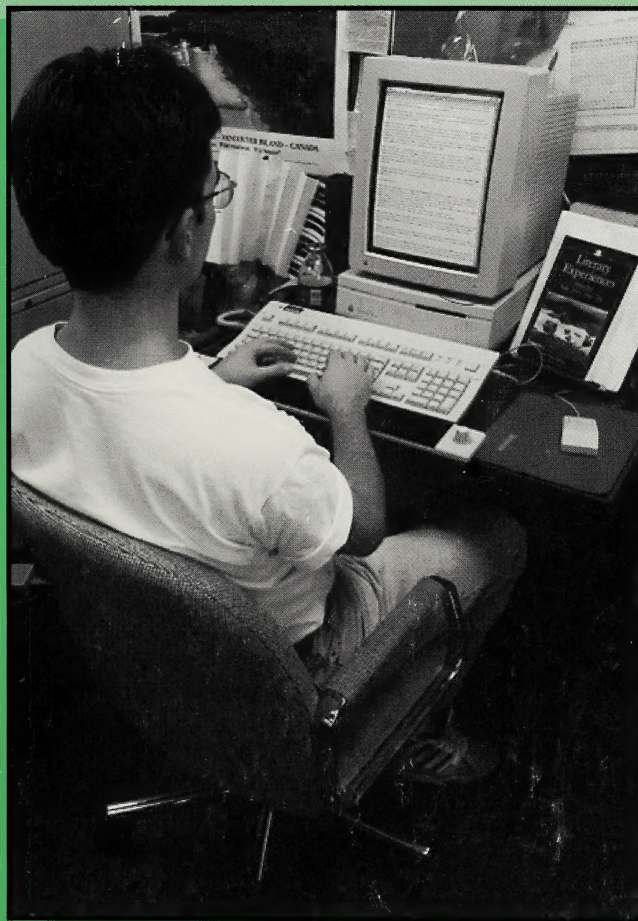
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English 30


Module 3

The Essay



Distance
Learning

Alberta
EDUCATION



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English 30

Module 3

THE ESSAY



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Other	

English 30
Student Module
Module 3
The Essay
Alberta Distance Learning Centre
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Welcome to Module 3!

We hope you'll enjoy your study of
The Essay.

We've included a prerecorded
audiocassette with this module. The
cassette will help you work through
the material and it will enhance your
listening skills.

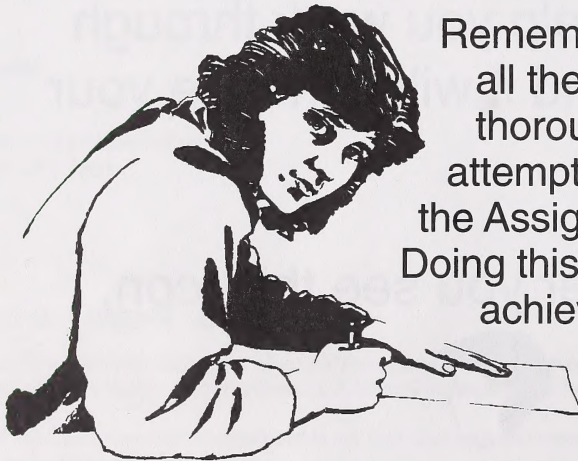
So whenever you see this icon,



turn on your tape and listen.

One important resource you'll be using all the time is your notebook. Because there are no response lines provided in the Student Module Booklets of this course, you'll need a notebook or lined paper to respond to questions, complete charts, and answer questionnaires. It's important to keep your lined paper handy as you work through the material and to keep your responses together in a notebook or binder for review purposes later. Read all of the questions carefully, and respond to them as completely as possible. Then compare your responses with the ones supplied in the Appendix.

Some of your personal responses you'll be asked to keep in a separate folder – your Writing Folder. This process is explained in Module 1.



Remember to work through all the module activities thoroughly before attempting the questions in the Assignment Booklet. Doing this will help you to achieve better success in your studies.

Good luck.

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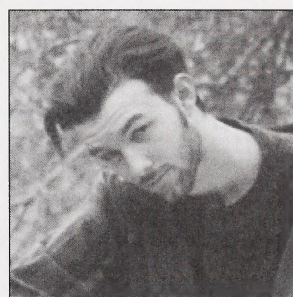


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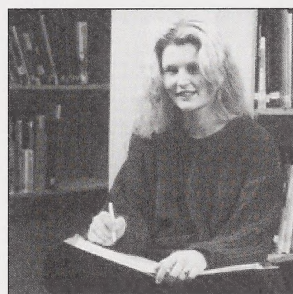


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The first part of the report is a general statement of the purpose of the study. It is to determine the effect of the new method of teaching on the learning of the subject. The second part is a description of the method of teaching. It is a method of teaching which is based on the principle of the learning by doing. The third part is a description of the method of learning. It is a method of learning which is based on the principle of the learning by doing. The fourth part is a description of the results of the study. It is a method of learning which is based on the principle of the learning by doing.

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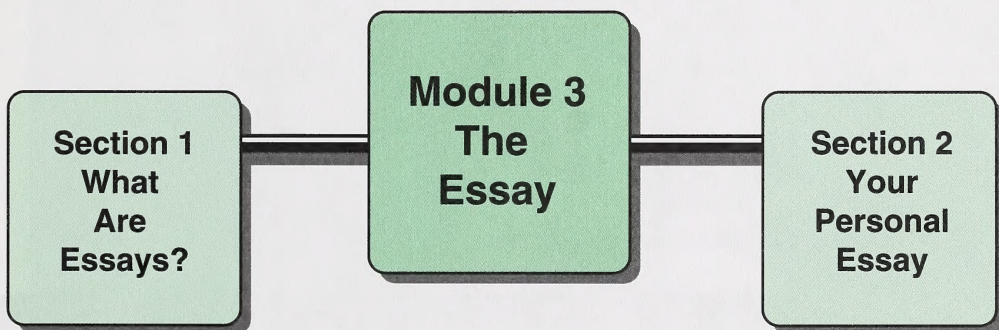
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MODULE OVERVIEW



Read essays? For pleasure?! Believe it or not, essays have been a popular literary genre for hundreds of years. Where else can writers and thinkers express their views in a personal, readable way on subjects they find intrinsically fascinating? And where else can readers go for short, thoughtful, and often lively discussions on topics as diverse as the pleasures of fly fishing and the moral implications of euthanasia?

Many famous magazines have built lasting reputations on the quality of their essays. If you haven't yet discovered the pleasure that can come from reading a good essay, perhaps this module will help you find it. It should also help you refine your own essay-writing skills.



Evaluation

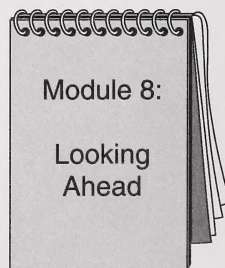
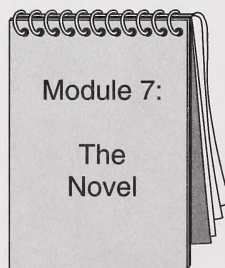
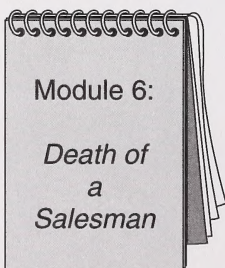
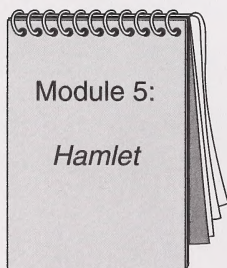
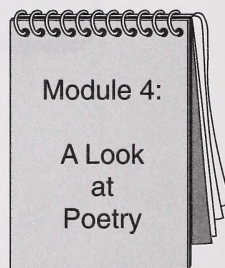
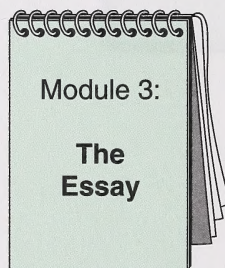
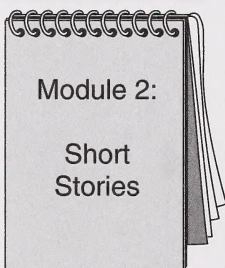
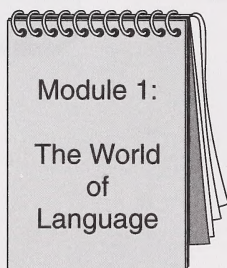
Your mark in this module will be determined by how well you complete the work in your Assignment Booklet. In this module you must complete two section assignments. The mark distribution is as follows:

Section 1 Assignment	50 marks
Section 2 Assignment	50 marks

TOTAL **100 marks**

COURSE OVERVIEW

English 30 contains eight modules.



SECTION

1

WHAT ARE ESSAYS?



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Do you groan whenever a teacher asks you to write an essay? If so, you're not alone; unfortunately many students get the idea that essays are things invented by English teachers to make their lives just a bit tougher.

The fact is that the essay has been a popular nonfiction genre for hundreds of years; many good writers have made their reputations as essayists, and their works have delighted generations of readers.

This section will attempt to improve your ability to take pleasure in the genre of the essay. It will discuss the importance of style and voice in essay writing and will finish with a look at methods writers use to create humour in their essays. You'll be able to apply the concepts you'll be studying when you analyse essays in your Section 1 Assignment.

Activity 1: The Personal Essay

Why Write Essays?



Literary
Experiences
II



Perhaps the best way to begin a study of essays is by reading one. Turn to page 166 of your text *Literary Experiences* and read “A Celebration of the Emotions” by American writer Ellen Goodman. As you read, ask yourself why Goodman wrote this essay; what did she hope to leave with her readers when they’d finished reading the piece?



WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following questions.

Describe your feelings upon reading “A Celebration of the Emotions.” What thoughts do you have on the essay’s topic? Explain your response to Goodman’s ideas.

1. In Module 1 you were presented with this list of five common purposes for which essays are written:

- to inform
- to persuade
- to describe
- to entertain
- to reflect

Which of these do you think best describes Ellen Goodman’s purpose in writing her essay “A Celebration of the Emotions”? Explain your answer.

2. In a sentence or two, sum up the thesis of the essay.
3. Again thinking back to Module 1 (Section 2: Activity 3) tell where you’d place this essay on the personal/expository continuum. Explain your reasons.

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 1.



So, did anyone have any problems identifying "A Celebration of the Emotions" as a personal essay?

Not a chance! I mean, you can tell the writer took her topic seriously, but her tone sure isn't academic sounding.



That's right. She uses a natural, conversational style, talks easily about friends and personal experiences, and seems at least as much interested in entertaining her readers as in enlightening them.

Yeah, and expressions like, let's see ... oh, here it is ... "Well, as Margaret Mead would have said, 'Piffle,'" sure tell you that it's an informal essay. By the way, who was Margaret Mead?



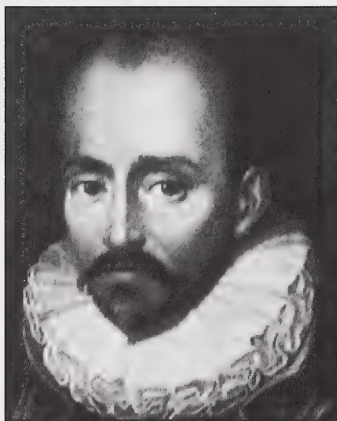
She was a famous American anthropologist who died in the 1970s. She spent a lot of time studying so-called "primitive" peoples, and then she applied what she learned about human behaviour to our supposedly more complex society.

Anthology: a collection of literary selections by a variety of writers

The genre of the essay admits of a very wide variety of styles, purposes, and intended audiences. In fact, this is true to such an extent that even defining the word *essay* becomes rather difficult. Some commentators have gone so far as to define an essay in terms of what it's not. Sharon Brown, in editing her **anthology** *Essays of Our Time*, had this to say:

... One can only set down without risk of contradiction that an essay is any shortish piece of prose that will not conveniently fit into a narrower category. In other words, it may be anything and everything, provided only that it is not definitely something else!

Literally the word *essay*, taken from the French noun *essai*, means an attempt or a try. The term, and the genre itself, was originated by the French writer Michel de Montaigne (1533 to 1592) when, in 1580, he published the first of two books of his *Essais* – his attempts at putting down his thoughts on a variety of topics in short, compact, but very readable chapters. This new form of writing, with its relaxed and personal style masking deep and prolonged reflection, gave birth to a tradition of writing that has flourished ever since.



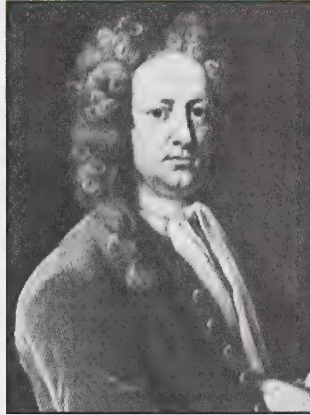
Michel de Montaigne is regarded as the father of the essay.

Since Montaigne's day the essay has proven itself to be a highly elastic form of writing that can embrace a broad spectrum of styles and purposes. Though works of nonfiction, essays, especially personal essays, can be highly creative, imaginative pieces of writing that should delight readers while informing them or trying to persuade them of some point of view. And all essays, unlike articles or reports, should contain something of the personality of the person who wrote them. If a work is a true essay, no matter how formal its style, it will be a personal expression of ideas on a topic that interested the writer, and it will reveal something of that person's character.

4. What does "A Celebration of the Emotions" reveal about Ellen Goodman as a person?

Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 1.

Whenever a person attempts to express concisely and in a nonfictional format, in prose and on paper, personal views on a subject that he or she finds interesting, that person is writing an essay. This means, of course, that the range of topics on which essays can be written is limited only by people's imagination. People write essays about the eternal questions of philosophy – truth, beauty, God, freedom, and immortality. They write essays about the great issues of their time – prejudice and discrimination, perhaps, or human rights, greater equality, and euthanasia. Conversely, people write essays about the most seemingly trivial events – such as their friends' having babies late in life – though good writers generally use these "trivial" events to make wise observations that go well beyond the events themselves.

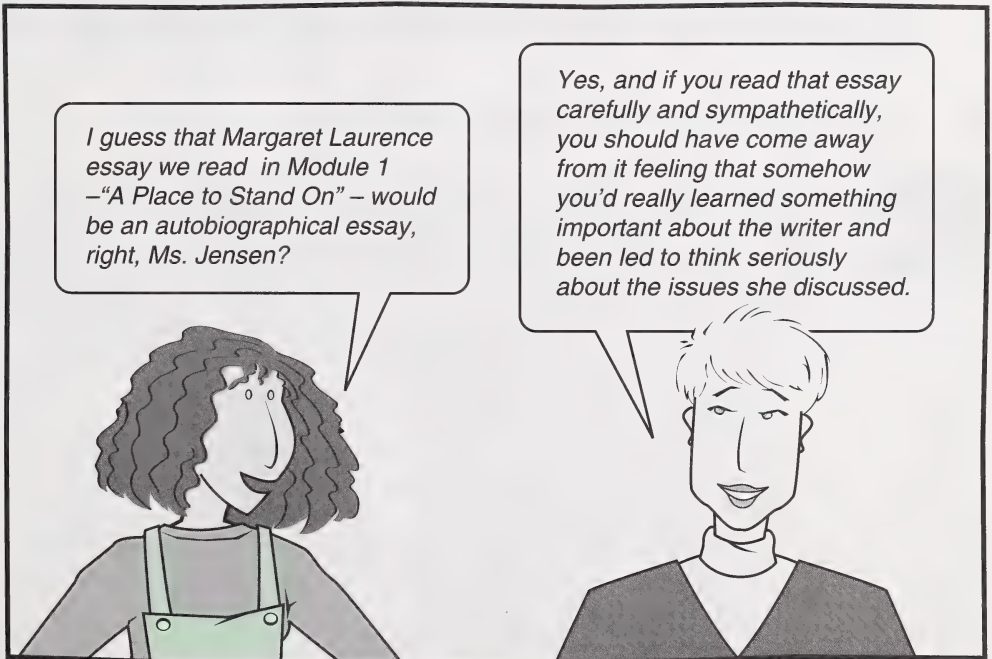


Three famous early English essayists were (respectively) Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Joseph Addison (1671-1719), and Richard Steele (1672-1729).

Autobiographical:
concerning the
writer's own life

Many essays are **autobiographical**; after all, what interests people more than their own lives? Such essays, in relating events from the writers' lives, will often use **narration** and may appear quite similar to short stories; they differ, however, in that they're nonfiction and in that the narrative is clearly secondary to the observation(s) the writer is making.

Narration: the
telling of a story,
event, or series
of events



To give you an idea of the variety and scope of essay topics, here's a sampling of titles taken from *Points of View*, a collection of essays formerly used to teach English 30:

- "Of Marriage and Single Life"
- "A Prize Fight"
- "The Uncertainty of Friendship"
- "On Wealth, Poverty, and Merit"
- "On the Ignorance of the Learned"
- "Autobiographical Sketch"
- "On Lying in Bed"
- "On Being Poor"
- "On American Leisure"
- "The Canadian Personality"
- "The Pursuit of Humour"
- "How to Build an Outdoor Fireplace"
- "What Is Opinion?"
- "Time and the Machine"

If some of these titles sound a little old fashioned to you, bear in mind that they go back as far as the sixteenth century!

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following ideas.

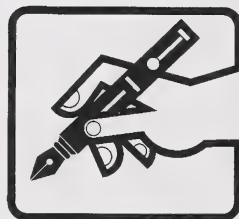
On what sorts of topics do you enjoy reading essays? Are they the same as the sorts of topics you like writing about? Do you prefer essays designed chiefly to entertain? to inform? to persuade? to describe? to reflect? Explain your answer. Try to be specific.

Your Essay-Writing Assignment



Essays, especially personal essays, can make for very enjoyable, often thought-provoking, reading. Unfortunately the very word *essay* has acquired negative associations for many students; they tend to associate it with dry writing assignments, deadlines, and gradings.

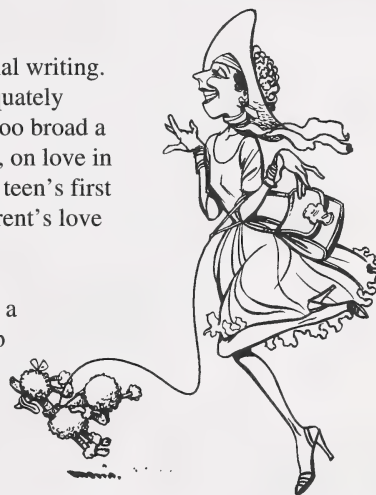
One goal of this module is to help you come to an appreciation of just how pleasurable it can be to read a good essay. Many readers, in fact, prefer essays to works of fiction; that element of reality gives them the grounding they need – that sense that they're reading about something real. Another goal – perhaps a more challenging one – is to get you to take pleasure in putting down your own thoughts in a well-crafted personal essay on some topic that genuinely interests you.



To that end your Section 2 Assignment for Module 3 will be to write a personal essay; and you'll be working toward that goal, at least in part, throughout Section 2. You've already done some writing of this sort in Module 1; but the essay you'll be asked for here will be a somewhat fuller, more polished work than anything you've done up to now in this course. You won't be expected to get started on your essay just yet, but you should begin thinking about it; that's why it's being introduced now. The essays you'll be reading as you work through Section 1, along with the instruction and practice in aspects of essay writing, will help prepare you for writing a personal essay of your own.

Because it's important that your essay express your ideas on a subject that interests you, no attempt will be made to limit you to a predetermined list of possible topics. You should begin now, however, to think of a topic of your own. As you begin doing this, bear these points in mind:

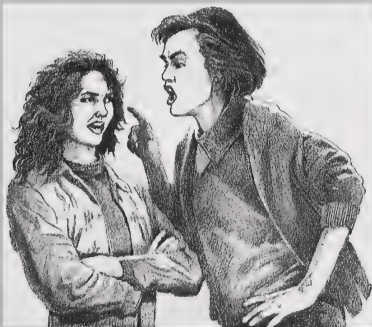
- Good writers always know who their intended audience is and write appropriately. Your audience will be your English 30 teacher or learning facilitator; make sure your topic will be appropriate.
- An essay was defined as a **short** piece of nonfictional writing. That means your topic must be one that can be adequately discussed in a short piece of writing, so don't pick too broad a topic. Rather than express your views, for example, on love in general, consider presenting your observations on a teen's first romance, people's loves for their pets, or what a parent's love for a child can accomplish.
- Remember that you're writing a personal essay, not a report or research paper. You may very well end up having to look up the odd fact or refer back to something you've read, but what the assignment is all about is **your** views on a topic presented in an interesting and readable manner – not a lot of researched facts and figures.



WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following:

What are your initial feelings and thoughts on your essay assignment as described above? Suggest a few topics you might write on. If you wish, do a bit of freewriting, brainstorming, or webbing on these topics to see where it leads.



If you're having trouble coming up with a topic, these two ideas might help:

- Think back over the last two weeks. Did you argue with anyone? Did you see, read about, or hear about anything you thought should be changed? What was it?
- Think about what interests you. What do you know more about than most people do?

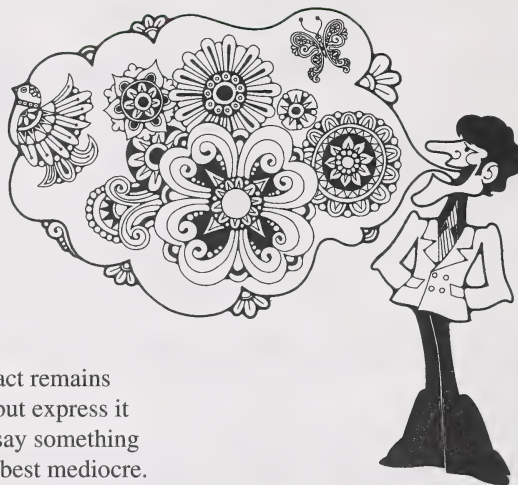
Activity 2: Style and Voice



Whenever you read any work of literature, you judge it, whether you know it or not, on the basis of two general criteria:

- what the writer says
- how he or she says it

This holds true, of course, when a teacher – or anyone else – reads your own written compositions. Some may describe the distinction as being between content and form; others may use the words *matter* and *manner*. But whatever words are used, the fact remains that if you have something important to say but express it badly, or conversely, use a pleasing style to say something trivial and humdrum, your writing will be at best mediocre.



Style: a writer's way of using language

This activity will focus on the manner or form (the way things are expressed) in writing, in particular in the writing of essays. In the discussion that follows two different but closely related concepts will be examined – **style** and **voice**.

Style in Writing

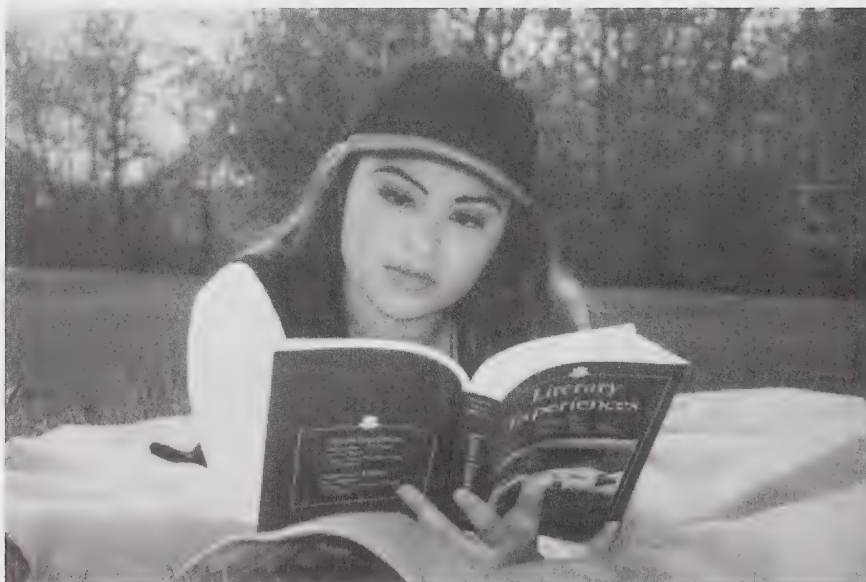


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Figurative language: language that uses figures of speech such as metaphors and similes to achieve special effects



1. Turn back to Ellen Goodman's essay "A Celebration of the Emotions" (page 166 in *Literary Experiences*) and reread the first couple of pages, noting the manner in which the writer chose to present her idea. Look for things like these:
 - her diction
 - her formality or informality of tone
 - the type, length, and complexity of her sentences
 - the use (if any) of **figurative language**
 - the use of concrete details and examples

Now in a sentence or two try to describe Goodman's manner of writing.

2. Go back to Margaret Laurence's essay "A Place to Stand On" (page 66 in your text) and reread the first few pages. Describe Laurence's manner of writing in this essay.

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 2.



In responding to the two preceding questions, you were analysing the writers' styles – their ways of using language. Now everybody is familiar with the word style. What does it mean to you?



And haircuts.

I think of clothes.



And popular music.



But it also means more than individual things like that. I mean, if I say "Wes has absolutely no style," everyone knows what I mean – right, Wes?

I, personally, have no idea what you're talking about!



The concept of style applies equally to things people write. Some writers' styles are heavy and ponderous, full of big words and convoluted sentences. Other writers' styles are lively and informal, characterized by short sentences, everyday expressions, and a conversational tone. Your style – the way in which you express your ideas – is very important. As the writer Carl Van Doren put it in his essay "A Note on the Essay,"

What matters is the manner. If he [the essayist] has good matter, he *may* write a good essay; if he has a good manner he probably *will* write a good essay.

Style Analysis

There are a number of things to look for in analysing a writer's style, as you noted in responding to questions 1 and 2. Here's a slightly fuller discussion of things to look for.

Diction

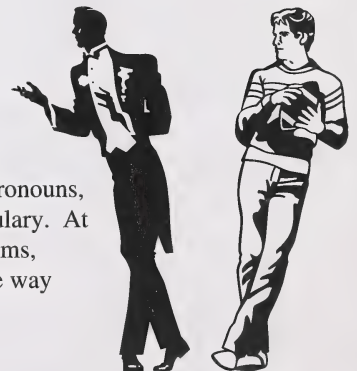
In analysing a writer's diction, ask yourself whether the words used are interesting and precise or vague, drab, and unexciting. Does the writer use several words where one good one would do? Is there evidence of a wide range of vocabulary, or does the writer often repeat the same word (other than to create emphasis)? Does the writer kill the piece with a lot of unnecessary big words? If slang is used, does it have a purpose?

Sentence Structure

Note the types of sentences a writer uses. A succession of short, simple sentences can be choppy but may contribute to a sense of speed. Long, complex sentences, by contrast, can make for a ponderous style. Interrogative sentences sound conversational, natural, and personal. A series of sentences structured in the same way can be monotonous, unless parallel structures are used deliberately for their effect.

Formality/Informality

The degree of formality of a piece of writing really hinges on such things as diction and sentence structure. A highly formal work uses no contractions, never addresses the reader directly (by asking questions, for example), avoids personal pronouns, and tends to use complex sentence structures and a big vocabulary. At the other extreme, very informal pieces use slang, colloquialisms, contractions, and personal pronouns; and they sound much the way people speak in conversations – natural and relaxed.



Tone

Always ask yourself what a writer's attitude is to what's being written. Again, this will be indicated by such things as diction, sentence structures, and the degree of formality.

Figurative Language

You'll be looking at figurative language in greater depth in Module 4, but you should be familiar with figures of speech like similes and metaphors. When analysing any writer's style, keep an eye out for figures of speech; some people write in a very plain, prosaic manner; others become almost poetic in their use of figurative language, evoking emotive responses from their readers with their highly connotative imagery. For an example of this sort of writing, consider reading Dylan Thomas's essay "A Child's Christmas in Wales" on page 270 of *Literary Experiences*; this isn't a work you'll be studying in this course; but if you read it, it will give you an idea of how a master stylist can turn prose into something as rich and evocative as poetry.



Concrete Details

Styles of writing can vary in their concreteness. Some writers adopt a highly abstract style while others fill their works with concrete, down-to-earth examples and instances. Normally, the more abstract a piece of writing, the less impact it makes on readers, though this style can be appropriate for highly formal, expository essays. Personal essays normally have a good many concrete references that bring them to life while making them more readily understandable. This is another element you should watch for in analysing a writer's style.

A Style-Analysis Vocabulary



I've noticed in this discussion that a number of adjectives were used to describe style – like lively, heavy, ponderous, natural ...

Yeah, and relaxed, conversational, and, and, oh yeah, convoluted.

Is there a special vocabulary we should have if we're going to talk about writers' styles?

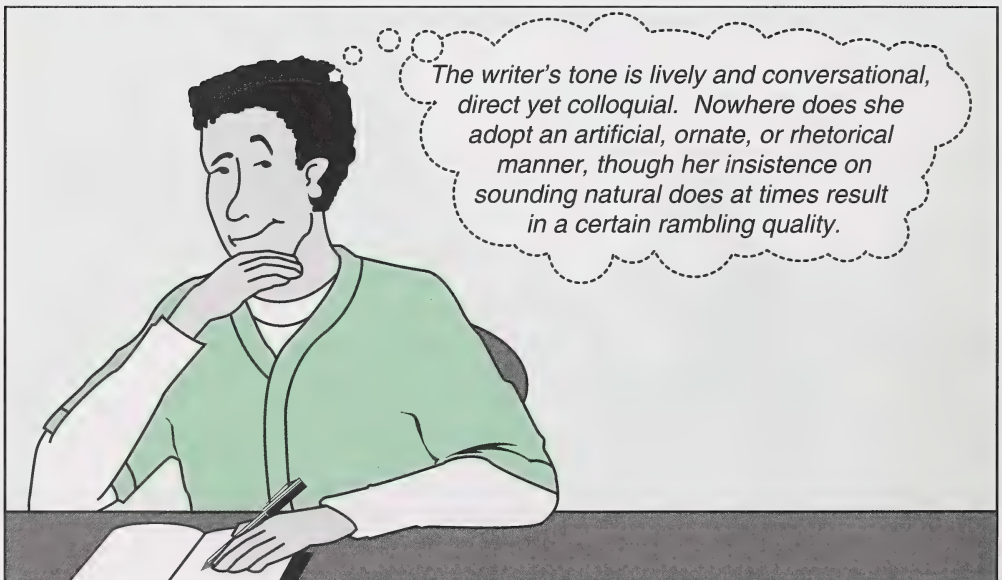


Well, I don't want you to think you have to memorize a list of adjectives and apply them mechanically; but if you're going to analyse writers' styles and – more importantly – work at improving your own, it does help to have an adequate vocabulary.

To help you out, here's a list of a few adjectives commonly used to describe style in writing. In cases where the meanings may not be immediately apparent, short explanations are given.

- | | |
|--|-------------------|
| • convoluted (full of complicated, involved sentences) | • lively |
| • sententious (containing witty statements to prove a point) | • heavy/ponderous |
| • ornate (fully of flowery, decorative language) | • natural |
| • rhetorical (elevated, pompous) | • plain |
| • terse (making every word count – to the point) | • conversational |
| • colloquial | • funny/amusing |
| • precise | • plodding |
| • elegant | • satirical |
| • direct | • ironic |
| • impassioned | • restrained |
| • rambling | • pompous |
| • artificial | |

Of course, this list is by no means exhaustive; you may well be able to think of many other appropriate ways of describing style. Bear in mind, too, that there's overlap in the list; many of the adjectives have almost the same meanings, with only slight shades of difference. The list should, though, give you a good working vocabulary for style analysis.



Don't overdo those handy adjectives when analysing a writer's style. Illustrate the points you make with examples taken from the work you're analysing.

Now that you've got the tools, it's time to put you to work. In what follows, you'll be reading two more essays from *Literary Experiences* and analysing the writers' styles. Now the fact is that the essays in this anthology were all carefully selected, so you won't find any written in a convoluted, plodding, or pompous style; but you should still be able to distinguish stylistic differences among the essays.



Turn to page 206 in *Literary Experiences* and read “My Father” by Doris Lessing. Read the essay for pleasure and for what you can learn from it, but keep an eye on the writer’s style as well.

3. Describe Doris Lessing’s style in this essay. Explain your answer by referring to specific details in the essay.
4. Writers adopt a style in order to achieve an effect – to create a mood and make a certain impression on the reader. What effect(s) does Doris Lessing achieve in “My Father” by adopting the style she does?



Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 2.

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to **one** of the following ideas.

1. In her essay Doris Lessing makes an honest, straightforward attempt to describe her father the way he really was – with his good points along with his shortcomings. Do you feel you really got to know this man? Was the writer, in fact, entirely honest? Can children ever really see their parents in an unbiased light?
2. Write a short piece of a few paragraphs in which you honestly try to describe the personality of a member of your family.



Now turn to page 258 of *Literary Experiences* and read the essay “Seasons in the Rain” by Canadian writer Silver Donald Cameron. In this essay Cameron, like Doris Lessing, tries honestly to describe something close to him – in this case a place, not a person. Enjoy the essay; then answer the questions that follow.

5. Describe Cameron’s style in “Seasons in the Rain.”
6. Which essay did you enjoy more, Cameron’s or Lessing’s? Why? Was style a factor in determining your preference? Explain your answer.

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 2.



WRITING FOLDER

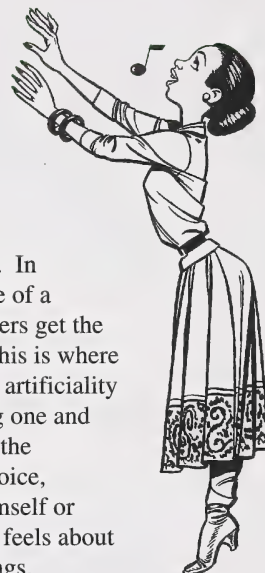
In your Writing Folder describe a place that's important to you. In your response you might wish to imitate aspects of Cameron's style in "Seasons in the Rain."

Finding Your Voice



Whenever two or more teachers get together to evaluate a student's writing (yes, teachers do discuss students' work together at times), one of the most frequently heard comments is "Well, it certainly has voice," or "Technically it's good, but it lacks voice."

Voice is a concept similar to style, but it's not quite the same thing. In Module 1 *voice* was defined as "the personal and recognizable style of a writer," and you were told that a piece of writing has voice "if readers get the feeling that they're truly in touch with the person who wrote it." This is where voice differs most clearly from style. Style can have an element of artificiality about it. Accomplished writers can adopt different styles, shedding one and assuming another as easily as they change their clothes (remember the discussion in Module 2 of the personas that writers can adopt?). Voice, however, is a person's own honest, authentic way of expressing himself or herself. Certainly it changes somewhat depending on how a writer feels about his or her subject matter, but it always honestly reflects those feelings.



So style is something you can acquire while voice is just my own, honest feelings and way of expressing myself?

Yes – though letting your own voice come through in your writing can also be an acquired skill. Many good students, in fact, try so hard for a sophisticated, "slick" style that their own voice – the sense that there's a real human being communicating here – disappears. Students like these have to learn how to write in their own voice.



If you're still confused, this may help. English teachers often note that it's their weaker students who write with the strongest voice. Finding it difficult to assume a style or write the way they think the teacher wants, these students will tend to write honestly and without pretence; and that honesty always comes through in the writer's enthusiasm, energy, and truthfulness. Of course the real trick is to write with your own voice **and** a polished style – something that's not easy to do.

7. Here are two short paragraphs written by elementary school students asked to describe their pets. (Writing at this level is being used because its simplicity makes it easier to analyse for voice.) The pieces are written with all their mechanical errors unchanged. Read the two pieces; then explain which one has the stronger voice.

○	<i>My Dog Ralph</i>
	<i>My dog Ralph is a Saint Bernard, one of the biggest kinds of dog in the world. He weighs over 75 kilograms. He is mainly brown and white with some black spots on his head. My parents won't let Ralph in the house because he smells bad sometimes and he drools alot and he is so big he can take food right off the counter. Ralph sleeps alot and he is 13 years old. I like my dog alot.</i>
	<i>— Robyn</i>

	<i>Ginger</i>
○	<i>My favorite member of my family is my dog Ginger. She's a lassie collie with this big furry ruff around her neck that I love burrying my face in because its so warm and smells so good and makes me feel safe and cozy. Ginger stays out at night but in the morning Mum lets her in and she comes right to my room and checks to see if I'm alive by licking me with a big slobbery lick right on my face, its yucky but I love waking up that way. Ginger is my best friend and I tell her all my secrets. Sometimes I forget she's a dog and I think she's really this really nice person in a dog suit. I just hope she never finds the zipper.</i>
	<i>— Cory</i>

8. Now go back and reread a number of your Writing Folder entries. Try to characterize your own voice and style. What's effective? What needs work? Sum up your findings in a paragraph or two.

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 2.

Whenever you revise your own writing – especially writing of the personal, expressive sort – check to see that your own voice comes through. Here are some questions you can ask yourself:

- Does my writing sound as if I care about the subject?
- Have I said what I really mean and feel?
- Have I written in a way that's interesting and natural?
- Have I included details that others might not have thought about?
- Does my writing sound involved? confident?
- Does my writing sound like **me**?



Of course the word *voice*, applied as you've been doing it, is borrowed from the realm of speaking and the oral transmission of information. As you read in Module 1, speakers have a much larger range of tools available to them than writers to convey their feelings and attitudes. It's easy to see how a speaker with a flat, monotone style can be said to lack voice as compared to a dynamic orator who uses the full range of pitch, volume, emphasis, and speed that oral delivery allows.

But even without the variety of voice techniques available to a speaker, individuals all have their own "voice" when they talk; that is, they all have ways of speaking that are peculiar to themselves. Try this experiment sometime. Listen to a conversation between your friends or family members (and don't forget to listen to yourself). Then

imagine that someone taped the conversation and copied out a transcript of the tape without including the names of the speakers. How would you, on being presented with the transcript, know which person said what? It's that quality telling you who's speaking that makes for each person's voice.



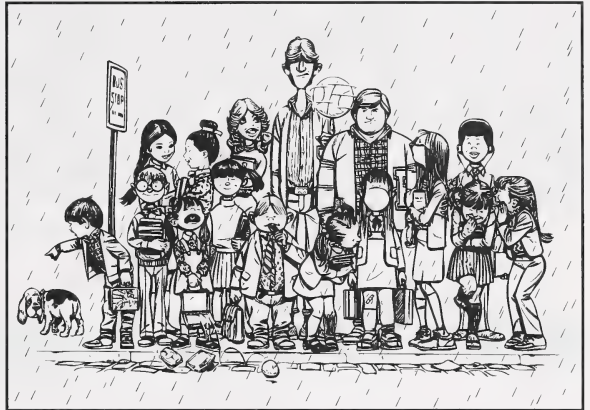
If you'd like actually to carry out this experiment, go ahead, but before you show the transcript to anyone, get the permission of the speakers first (but don't tell them they're being taped until you've done it or the conversation's naturalness will be destroyed).

Whenever you write, you should adopt an appropriate style and try to develop your own honest voice. These are things you'll be able to work at in this module as you write your personal essay.

Activity 3: The Humorous Essay – A Special Case



When you read “Seasons in the Rain,” you no doubt noted the humour Silver Donald Cameron used to create a light, playful tone in what is otherwise a rather serious reflection on growing up in Vancouver and what a home town means to a person. Examples are passages like “Persons who express doubt about the climate are barred from voting in municipal elections” and “The rains begin . . . at the beginning of September. They continue virtually unbroken till the end of the following August.” These passages both appear on the essay’s first page and instantly alert readers to the fact that they aren’t to take everything in the essay seriously. In this respect humorous essays break the rule that essays are works of nonfiction; much – or all – of the content of a humorous essay can be entirely invented by the writer.



Anticlimax: a sudden shift from something important to something trivial

Incongruity: juxtaposing unlike ideas

Ambiguity: a play on two meanings the same word may have

Irreverence: the adoption of a flippant attitude to a serious subject

Malapropism: the ridiculous confusion of words that sound somewhat alike (“My father does situps to strengthen his abominable muscles.”)

Have you ever noticed that as soon as you’ve had to explain a joke to someone it’s no longer funny? Unfortunately, analysing an essay for how its humour is achieved has the same effect. Bearing this in mind, however, here’s a list of a few of the methods essayists use to make their readers laugh:

- **anticlimax**
- **incongruity**
- **exaggeration**
- **understatement**
- **parody**
- **ambiguity** (or double entendre)
- **irreverence**
- **malapropism**
- **the reversal of reader expectations**

Now for some fun. Turn to page 448 of *Literary Experiences* and read Woody Allen’s “My Speech to the Graduates.” Enjoy the essay, but try to note, too, how Allen achieves his humour.

Clearly the whole essay “My Speech to the Graduates” is a parody of a standard graduation speech – the kind that’s full of platitudes and exhortations to students to work hard and hang onto their dreams. In sending up this kind of speech, Allen uses a variety of techniques of achieving humour.



1. Try to find an example from the essay of each of the techniques listed just before you were assigned the reading.
2. On which of these techniques does Allen rely most heavily to achieve his humour?
3. This essay, since it's set up as a speech, achieves its full humorous potential when read aloud. Practise reading the speech orally, working on your timing, emphasis, and style of delivery to maximize its effect. When you think you have it down pat, tape yourself and play your recording for friends or family members – preferably people unfamiliar with the essay. What reaction were you able to achieve? Have you potential for a career as a stand-up comedian?

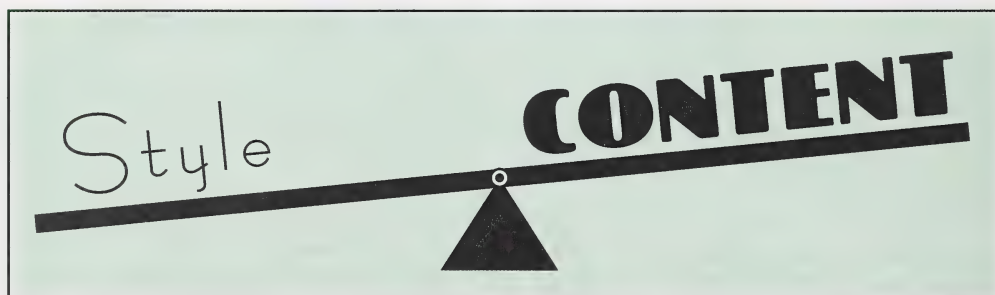


Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 3.

Activity 4: A Look at Content



The preceding activities focused principally on style; you were shown how important an appealing manner is in essay writing, especially in the case of very personal essays meant chiefly to entertain. In most essays, though – and this is especially true as you get closer to the expository side of the continuum – matter is important as well. A good essay should say something as well as entertain; it should, like an interpretive story, make you think things over and give you new insights – as Margaret Laurence's "A Place to Stand On" or Ellen Goodman's "A Celebration of the Emotions" clearly do.



The essay you're about to read should entertain you while giving you a good deal to think about. Written by American writer Jon Nordheimer, it tells the tragic story of one American soldier and the effects the war in Vietnam had on him; but it raises much broader issues about race, equality, and human psychology.

Turn to page 192 of *Literary Experiences* and read Nordheimer's "From Dakto to Detroit: Death of a Troubled Hero." As you read, pay attention both to what the essay has to say and to how that information is presented.



WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following ideas.

What are your feelings about Dwight Johnson's death? Who, or what, was chiefly responsible – Johnson's society, his wartime experiences, or Johnson himself? Do you think his mother was right when she said " 'Sometimes I wonder if Skip tired of this life and needed someone else to pull the trigger.' "?



1. "From Dakto to Detroit: Death of a Troubled Hero" chronicles the experiences of one man, but the writer nowhere sets out a specific thesis. What insights do you think Nordheimer wanted his readers to gain from this essay?



Allusion: in literature, a reference to someone or something with which the writer assumes readers will be familiar

As you're well aware, writers should always write with their audience in mind and tailor their work to suit that audience. Clearly Nordheimer has written his essay for an American readership – people familiar with recent U.S. history, the racial tensions in the country, American military terms, and so on. References to the Vietnam war, the use of expressions like *N.A.A.C.P.* without accompanying explanations, and mentions of such things as "the Nixon inaugural" and "the Kennedy memorial" make this clear.

References like these in works of literature, with which the writer assumes readers will be familiar, are called **allusions**. All writers must be careful with the allusions they make; it's extremely important that the background knowledge of their readers is accurately matched with what the writers assume it to be. It's also important to bear in mind that over time, facts, and even ways of speaking, with which readers are familiar will change; since Nordheimer wrote his essay, for example, a whole generation has grown up who are no longer as immediately familiar with the war in Vietnam.

Too many allusions to current or popular culture can quickly date an essay; on the other hand, carefully chosen allusions can give a work an authentic feeling of the time and place of which the author is writing. Either way, bear in mind that essays will very often spring from a definite social context and that this context must be understood if an essay is to be fully appreciated.

2. a. Were there any allusions made in "From Dakto to Detroit: Death of a Troubled Hero" with which you were unfamiliar? Give examples.
- b. If you answered "yes" to question a., did this lack of familiarity make for any serious difficulty in understanding the essay? Explain.

This essay contains a good deal of investigative reporting. The writer includes excerpts from many interviews and includes a healthy dose of specific facts – names, places, exact locations. An essay, however, has been defined as a work in which a writer presents a personal viewpoint on a subject.

3. Does Jon Nordheimer simply present the facts he's dug up in an objective manner, or has he also interpreted them for his readers? In other words, has he left it up to his readers to infer what they will from the facts, or are readers really being fed Nordheimer's view of things? Use details to explain your answer.
4. Following are five statements taken from the essay. For each one, tell what inference readers can reasonably make.
 - a. And at home no one knew about the bad dreams he was having.
 - b. "He had a stack of pictures of dead people, you know, dead Vietnamese. Color slides."
 - c. Later, in the receiving line [at the medal-giving ceremony], when his mother saw Skip, she saw tears streaming down his face.
 - d. Companies that had not been interested in a difficult ex-G.I. named Johnson suddenly found openings for Medal of Honor winner Johnson.
 - e. It was about this time that the stomach pains started.



Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 4.



Ms. Jensen, one thing bothers me. This essay reads just like a straightforward, factual account; but I think it's really biased in favour of Dwight Johnson. I mean, it's like everything in his life is someone else's fault – even when he robs a store at gunpoint!

Good point. You're right that while the essay has the appearance of a purely investigative report, it really leads the reader to see things in a certain way. An important skill for any active reader is to be able to detect this sort of bias and evaluate the facts presented on their merits.



5. Try to think about only the facts you've learned about Dwight Johnson's life. Now evaluate Nordheimer's interpretation of these facts – his views on Johnson as a victim of war, of racism, of an exploitive society. Do you think his interpretation is fair? Has he used the facts honestly? Are his sources of information reliable? Use details to explain your answer.

Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 4.

Whenever you read an essay, unless it's pure entertainment like Woody Allen's essay "My Speech to the Graduates," keep a close eye on content. Try to be sensitive to any bias or manipulation by a good stylist. Evaluate what the writer has to say fairly; this means, of course, trying to put aside biases of your own – something that's not easy to do.

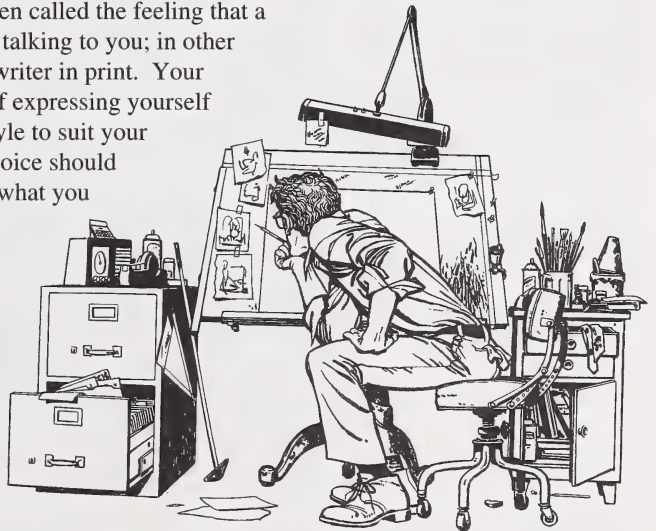
Follow-up Activities

If you found the activities difficult, you should complete the Extra Help. If you understand the concepts clearly, you should complete the Enrichment.

Extra Help

Do **one** or **more** of the following.

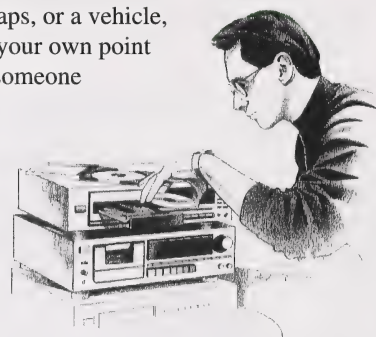
Voice in a piece of writing has been called the feeling that a real, unique individual is actually talking to you; in other words, it's the personality of the writer in print. Your voice is your own personal way of expressing yourself honestly; while you adapt your style to suit your purpose and audience, your true voice should shine through, breathing life into what you write. Art critics speak of "technicians" – painters or sculptors, perhaps, who are technically very skilled but whose work lacks that creative spark that distinguishes a true artist. The same distinction can be made amongst writers; talented stylists who lack voice seldom produce anything inspirational.



But while your voice is your own, one way to develop it is to become sensitive to the voices of others and even to try to write with their "voices." Writing to capture the voice of another person helps you come to identify and develop your own.

1. Bearing that in mind, try **one** or **more** of these writing exercises.

- a. Think of your favourite possession – a stereo, perhaps, or a vehicle, or even an article of clothing. Write about it from your own point of view; then write about it from the viewpoint of someone decidedly unenthusiastic about it.
- b. Think of a conflict situation you've been in with another person. Write about it first from your viewpoint; then from the other person's.
- c. Take a familiar child's story such as "Hansel and Gretel" or "The Three Little Pigs" and tell it from the point of view of the villain – the witch or the wolf.



2. Of course the final object in all this is to learn to write with a strong voice of your own, and a strong voice projects enthusiasm. Have you ever noticed how someone genuinely interested in a subject can infuse others with that same interest simply by projecting enthusiasm?

To develop your ability to project enthusiasm, try the following.

- a. Choose a topic that you think wouldn't interest most readers (two examples might be "How to Organize Your Freezer" and "Recycling the Pull-Tabs from Pop Cans"). Then write a short composition that makes your topic fascinating.
- b. Write a paragraph or two in which you talk about your favourite food. Make your discussion rich, colourful, and concrete; try to get your readers to experience fully just what you feel about your subject.



3. If you can get a copy, watch the ACCESS Network's half-hour videotape *Style*, part 2 of the series *Communicating with a Purpose*. Though the focus here is chiefly on fiction and poetry, the discussion of literary style in this videotape should improve your understanding of the concept and help you link it to mood and tone in writing.

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Extra Help.

Enrichment

Do **one** or **more** of the following.

1. If you enjoyed Woody Allen's "My Speech to the Graduates," try **one** or **both** of the following:
 - a.

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following idea.

A parody, as you know, is one of the satirist's principal tools. Woody Allen's "My Speech to the Graduates" is a light, funny parody of a high-school or university graduation speech. It's not meant to hurt or wound anyone; it's not biting satire. Its purpose is only to make people laugh.

Try writing a parody of your own using techniques like those used by Allen or any other satirist that you choose. Don't be nasty or vicious in your parody; rather, like Allen, try to write something funny. Here are some ideas you might consider parodying:

- a speech of a parent to a teenager who's stayed out too late
- an older person's sermon on how much tougher things were in the old days
- a TV-commercial testimonial by a user of some product – perhaps a denture adhesive or a deodorant
- a student's elaborate explanation to a teacher of precisely why his or her assignment just didn't get done
- any appropriate idea of your own



- b. *Literary Experiences* has another Woody Allen parody, this one in the form of a dramatization. "My Apology," on page 505 of your text, parodies the dialogues of Plato, a Greek philosopher who lived from 428 to 348 B.C. Plato wrote many dialogues in which the principal character was Socrates, another philosopher and Plato's teacher. Socrates himself never wrote anything, but his influence on the young men he taught in Athens was so great he was tried and executed on the trumped-up charges of corrupting the youth and blaspheming against the gods. Two of Plato's best known dialogues are the *Apology* (from which Woody Allen takes the title of his parody) in which Socrates eloquently presents his defence at his trial, and the *Phaedo*, in which, in prison, he explains his views on death and bravely drinks the poison hemlock that takes his life.



Literary
Experiences
II



With that background, you should be able to enjoy and understand “My Apology.” Note, as you read it, Allen’s methods of achieving humour. For what audience do you think he was writing?



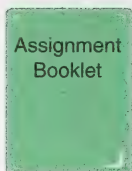
Literary Experiences contains a genuine excerpt from Plato’s most famous dialogue – the *Republic*. You might enjoy reading this very famous passage, called here “The Allegory of the Cave”; it would give you a good deal to think about and increase your understanding of some of Allen’s allusions (references) in “My Apology.” It’s on page 500 of your text. The narrator is Socrates.

2. If you’ve enjoyed the essays you’ve read in this section, why not read others from *Literary Experiences*? A good place to begin might be with “Return to India” by Santha Rama Rau.
3. If you can obtain a copy, watch *A Personal View: The Art of the Essay*, part of the series *Literary Visions*, distributed by Magic Lantern Communications Ltd. This half-hour videotape explores the essay – its origins, history, and characteristics. It should improve your understanding and appreciation of personal essays as a genre of literature.



Conclusion

You began your investigation of the personal essay in Section 2 of Module 1. The section you’ve just completed has continued that investigation, focusing in particular on style, voice, humour, and content in essays. The next section will take the investigation yet farther; in it you’ll practise some of the basics of good essay writing.



ASSIGNMENT

In your Assignment Booklet complete the assignment for this section.

SECTION

2

YOUR PERSONAL ESSAY



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Have you done much thinking about the personal essay you'll be writing as part of your Section 2 Assignment? If not, don't worry; this section will take you through the process stage by stage. You'll soon be getting down to the business of writing your own essay on a topic that interests you and in your own inimitable style and voice. The principal component of your assignment will be to hand in your personal essay, in which you'll demonstrate your mastery of the essay-writing skills you'll have studied. You'll also get the chance in your assignment to apply your ability to make inferences while reading an essay.

Activity 1: Getting Down to Business: Prewriting and Drafting

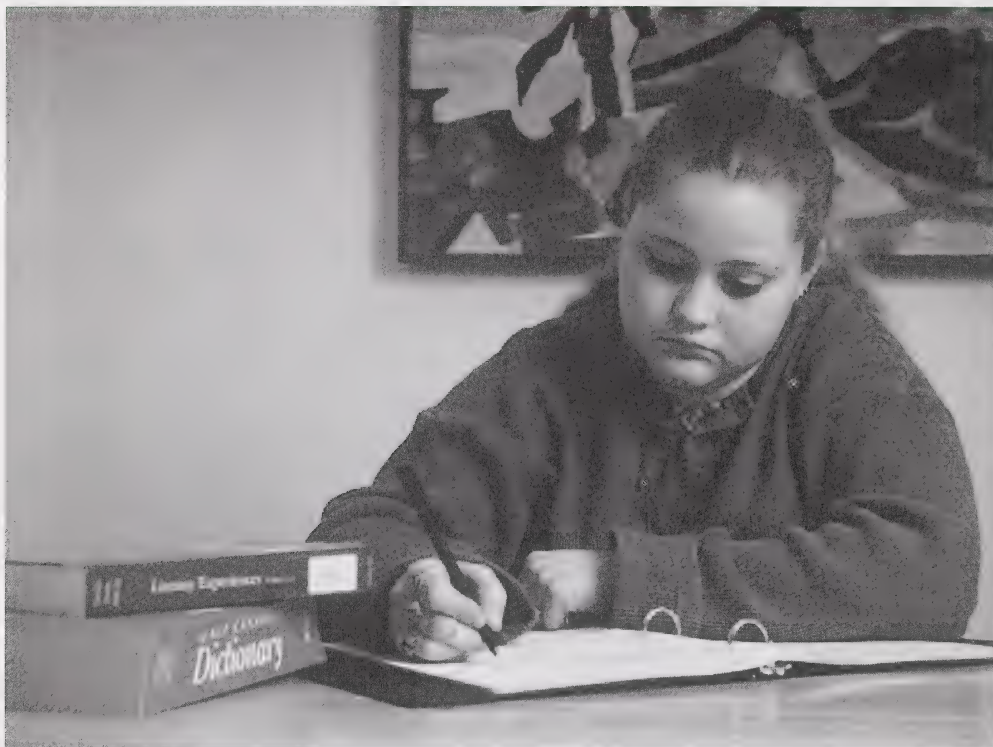


PHOTO SEARCH LTD.



In Section 1 you were told that part of your Section 2 Assignment would be to write an informal essay. Up to this point for the most part you've been reading and analysing essays written by other people; this experience should have given you an idea of the variety of subject matters and styles available to essay writers. Now, however, it's time to get into some of the nuts and bolts of writing your own personal essay.

As you've no doubt come to realize, personal essays aren't rigidly structured; as long as a writer's style and content meet his or her purpose and audience, almost anything goes. However, as with most things that appear simple and natural on the surface, a lot of hard work goes into producing a good personal essay.

This activity and the next will take you through the stages of producing your own personal essay. If you work through them methodically, you'll have done most of the work for that part of your Section 2 Assignment.

The Prewriting Stage

Stage 1: The Limited Topic

In Section 1: Activity 1 you were asked to start thinking of a topic for your essay. If you haven't yet come up with one, now is the time to do it. Remember to pick something that interests you and on which you have definite ideas to express. Remember, as well, to limit your topic to something that can be covered in a few paragraphs (you may, of course, find yourself limiting it even more as you develop your essay). Try webbing, brainstorming, or other prewriting techniques to come up with a limited topic.

1. The limited topic for my essay is _____.



Stage 2: The Thesis

Most essays (with the possible exception of those meant purely to entertain) have a thesis. In more formal expository essays, the thesis is usually stated explicitly in a **thesis statement** in the essay's introduction. In looser personal essays the thesis may or may not be stated outright; and if it is, it may appear later in the essay, probably in the conclusion. An unstated, or **implied, thesis** is very common in an informal essay; it's left up to the active reader to infer the writer's principal idea. But even if you never actually state your thesis in your essay, you should have a working thesis statement to keep you on track and focused while writing. Of course a working thesis statement can be revised – or scrapped entirely if it proves unworkable – but you must know what it is you want to say before you can say it.

2. The working thesis statement for my essay is _____.

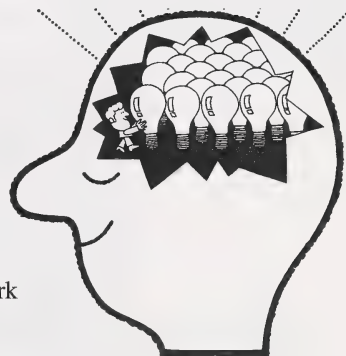
***Thesis statement:** a statement explicitly expressing the main idea of an essay*

***Implied thesis:** a thesis that is never explicitly stated. It's left up to the reader to infer.*

Stage 3: Generating Ideas

Once you have a topic and know what your central idea is, it's time to generate the supporting ideas. In a more formal expository or persuasive essay this generally involves developing the arguments you'll use to prove your point. In a personal essay it means thinking of illustrations, elaborations, and explanations to clarify what it is you have to say. The prewriting techniques you looked at in Module 1, such as brainstorming, webbing, freewriting, and so on can work well at this stage.

3. Take the time now to develop your thesis by webbing or whatever technique works for you. At this stage don't worry about organization; concentrate on generating ideas. If at this point it appears that you have too much for one essay, go back and revise your working thesis statement so as to reduce it to a more manageable size.



Stage 4: Organizing and Authoring

Traditionally students have been taught to write essays according to the standard vase-shaped pattern. According to this pattern every essay has an introduction that explicitly presents its thesis, a body of three or four paragraphs, each making a separate argument to support the thesis, and a conclusion that restates the thesis in a different way and wraps up the essay.

This highly structured approach to essay writing still has much to recommend it, especially in formal expository essays; it forces writers to be organized and logical. However, in less formal personal essays, it does inhibit creativity. You'd be hard pressed to find an essay following this pattern, for instance, in *Literary Experiences*.

Every essay, however, should have these three parts:

- a recognizable introduction that draws the reader into the essay
- a body that delivers on what the introduction has led the reader to expect
- a conclusion that leaves the reader with a sense of finality – that nothing has been left hanging



Organizing principle: in literature, the principle governing how ideas are shaped into a structure



Given that structure, however, you should feel free in a personal essay to develop it in any way that you feel works. It's most important, however, that you **do** have an organization; an essay that rambles and digresses will soon lose its hold on readers. That means you should have some overriding **organizing principle** around which you'll structure your writing. Perhaps your essay will be essentially a narrative; perhaps it will be largely descriptive or expository.

To get a clearer idea about the different ways essays can be organized, it might help to take a look at two short essays with very different organizing principles.

4. Turn to page 362 of *Literary Experiences* and read "Jamaican Fragment" by A.L. Hendricks. Keep an eye on how the essay is organized.
 - a. What is Hendricks' thesis in this essay?
 - b. What organizing principle has he used to present and illustrate this thesis?





5. Now turn to page 71 of your text and read "Mind Must Be the Firmer" by Canadian writer Timothy Findley. This short essay, a eulogy to Margaret Laurence after her death in 1987, has a very interesting organizing principle.
- What is the thesis of "Mind Must Be the Firmer"?
 - Describe the essay's organizing principle.

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 1.



Most essayists, after deciding on an organizing principle, write an outline of their essay.

Outlines! Oh no! I hate outlines. I never know how I want an essay to be until I write it; I just let it develop sort of – you know – naturally.



Me too. And if I have to hand in an outline, I write it afterwards. And I still get pretty good marks on my essays.

Actually, the approach used by these students can, in fact, work well for some writers as long as they have some organizing principle in mind and are prepared to do extensive rewriting at the revision stage. An outline, however, can save a lot of time at the writing and revision stages; the trick is to regard it not as something written in stone but as a general road map that tells you how you can get where you want to end up. Just as travellers can change routes if a more attractive alternative appears, so too should writers feel free to change – or even abandon – their outlines if, at the writing stage, they come up with better ideas.



There are probably as many ways of outlining as there are writers, but what follows is a standard format you can try, showing how to organize the major and minor points you intend to make in your essay. Most personal essays won't involve quite so many complexities; the outline is set up this way simply to illustrate how to include subdivisions within your discussion. Note that this is an outline of the body of an essay; the introduction and conclusion can be created at the writing stage.

Thesis Statement: _____

I. _____

A. _____

1. _____

2. _____

a. _____

b. _____

B. _____

1. _____

2. _____

a. _____

b. _____

II. _____

A. _____

1. _____

2. _____

B. _____

1. _____

2. _____

C. _____

6. Create an outline for your personal essay. Use the format illustrated above, or any outline style that feels comfortable.

Drafting

At the drafting stage you finally get down to some real writing. And the first thing to do at this point is to establish the tone and style of your essay. You've done a good deal of work on these concepts already, so you should know what they mean. It's important, though, to know precisely what tone you're adopting and how to implement that tone through your style. And to do this you need to know just who your audience is and what your purpose is in writing. An inappropriate tone or an inconsistent style will quickly ruin a well-planned essay.



7. The tone of my essay should be _____. The style I intend to adopt could be described as _____.

Writing an Introduction

Although most of what you have to say in an essay appears in the body, it's important to provide a framework for the body with a good introduction and conclusion.

An essay's introduction should do three things. It should

- tell your readers what you'll be discussing
- establish the essay's tone (and, in a more formal essay, the method of discussion to be used)
- grab the readers' attention

Hints for Writing an Introduction

Writing a good introduction can be difficult. Here are some hints that may make it easier:

- Don't be too formal, especially in a personal essay. Saying "In this essay the topic for discussion will be . . ." is clear but dull. Unless you're writing a very formal paper on a highly complex subject, try for a livelier way of beginning it. Never begin a personal essay this way.
- Keep your introduction short. Don't hide what you have to say with flowery, repetitive language. Avoid clichés.
- Don't be too abrupt – unless you deliberately intend to jolt the reader, and then immediately make the situation clear with an explanation, as in this example:

"Shark! Shark! Those were the very last words I'd hoped to hear during my first scuba diving experience."



- Avoid introductions that depend on the title for their meanings, as in this example:

What's Wrong with Canada?

This is a question I've been asking myself a good deal recently.

- Be sure to establish a tone in your introduction that will be consistently maintained throughout the essay.

Sample Introductory Techniques

If you're unsure how to begin an essay, here are a few standard techniques that can work well if used properly:

- You can begin with a quotation, being sure to explain the situation right away. Here's an example:

"If you want to succeed in life, work, work, work." That was my uncle Stephan's motto, and it pretty well summed up his life.

- You can begin by speaking directly to the reader.

Perhaps you've never thought about how a fish feels on the end of a hook.

- You can begin with an exclamation:

Patriotism breeds war! Throughout history . . .

- You can begin by correcting a common misconception.

It is sometimes said that only through great suffering can great art be produced. Not so.

- You can begin by asking a question.

Why is it that Canadians are so reluctant to honour their heroes?

- You can begin by dividing a topic into the divisions that you intend to discuss, though this approach normally would be very dry in a personal essay.

In examining the popular music of the 1960s, you should ask yourself these questions:

Of course there are so many more ways in which an imaginative writer can begin an essay. It would be a good idea at this point to reread the introductions to the essays you've read in *Literary Experiences* to see how a few professional writers begin their works.

8. Now write the introduction to your personal essay. Try to draw the reader in while establishing your topic and tone.



Drafting the Body

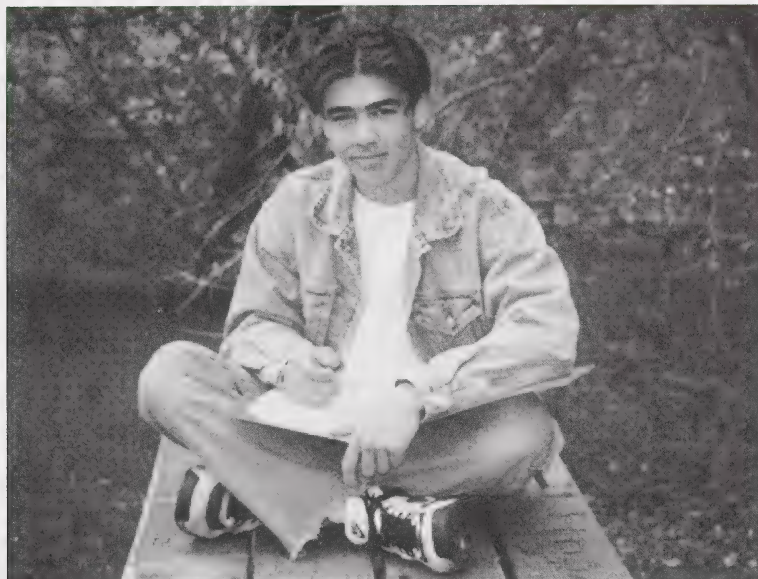


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With your outline made and your introduction written, you're all set to write the body of your essay. This is where you'll exercise your real writing skills.

Structuring Paragraphs

The body of your essay will be composed of several paragraphs. Learning to write well-developed paragraphs is essential.

A paragraph, as you well know, is a group of sentences that develops a single idea or topic and presents it as a unified whole. The sentences in a paragraph must relate to each other in the same way as links in a chain are connected. A misplaced or irrelevant idea, like an inferior link, tends to weaken the chain.

Just as a sentence is a basic unit of speech, so the paragraph is a basic unit of writing. For this reason the paragraph becomes most important in learning to write well. If you can write good paragraphs, then you should be able to write effective essays; for these consist simply of a series of related paragraphs.

Since a paragraph develops a single topic, normally, but not always, this topic is explicitly presented in a single sentence called the **topic sentence**. Often the topic sentence appears right at the beginning of the paragraph, but by no means always. A piece of writing of more than just a few paragraphs, each of which begins with a topic sentence, would become monotonous. Sometimes the topic sentence will appear at the end, with all that comes before building up to it. Sometimes it will appear in the middle of the paragraph; and at times there will be no topic sentence at all, though one will be implied by the content of the paragraph.

Topic sentence:
a sentence that
explicitly states
the main idea of
a paragraph

Here are examples of paragraphs discussing roughly the same subject, but with topic sentences positioned differently.

At the Beginning:

Last summer I had a wonderful time at the lake. Most of the first two weeks I spent out on (or in) the water – canoeing, fishing, sailing, and swimming. When I'd had my fill of this, I began to explore the woods around the cottage and found all sorts of interesting trails and old logging roads. I took my camera along and got some terrific shots of wildlife, including one of an adult black bear. I snapped that one in a hurry and beat a hasty retreat!

At the End:

Much of the first two weeks at the lake I spent on (or in) the water – swimming, sailing, canoeing, and fishing. When I tired of this, I began to explore the woods around the cottage, and followed some old logging roads and animal paths I discovered. I took my camera along and got some great photographs of wildlife, including a black bear. **On thinking back, I have to admit that I had a really wonderful time.**

In the Middle:

The first two weeks I spent at the lake last summer I devoted to water sports – swimming, sailing, canoeing, and fishing. I thoroughly enjoyed myself, but got a terrible sunburn. When I tired of these activities, however, I began to explore the surrounding woods. **That's when I really discovered what I'd been missing in the city.** I found lots of animal trails and some old logging roads that hadn't been used for years. I saw lots of wildlife, too, and took photographs of quite a number of animals, including one of an adult black bear. Needless to say, I didn't hang around long enough to take more than one shot of him.

No Topic Sentence (Implied Topic Sentence):

Some of the things I did at the lake in the summer were water sports such as swimming, canoeing, sailing, and fishing. I also spent quite a bit of time exploring the surrounding woods, where I found animal trails and old logging roads to follow. I brought my camera along and took quite a few photographs of wildlife, including my favourite – a shot of an adult black bear.

In the last paragraph the implied topic sentence might well have been this: **I had a wonderful time at the lake last summer.**



A paragraph, of course, is more than a topic sentence. You must also decide on a method of developing that topic sentence.

There's no rule to determine what method of development to use, but with the purpose clear, probably one method will seem more appropriate than another. If you're describing something, for example, you'll use details; if you're narrating, you'll usually tell what happened in a chronological order; if you're explaining, you'll use step-by-step detail; but don't make the mistake of thinking these forms are rigid. Many of them may be used in combination. In fact good writers do use a combination and seldom stop to consider which method they're using. As writers become experienced, they automatically use a method appropriate to their purpose.



Your handbook likely has something to say about the different ways of structuring paragraphs. For more information, check in the index under "Paragraph."

Writing Interesting Sentences

Sentence Varieties

Good writers have a sound understanding of sentence structure and can vary the sorts of sentences they use to achieve the effects they want. A style that consists of sentences of the same type and roughly the same length is tedious, just like a piece of music that consists of only one or two notes. Compare these two short paragraphs.



My Aunt Hue came to visit last week. I had never seen her before though she is over eighty years old. She is really quite a lively old girl. She turned out to be the life of the party on the weekend. She didn't go to bed until 4:00 a.m. By then all the guests had gone.

My Aunt Hue, whom I'd never seen before, came to visit last week. Although she's over eighty years old, she's really quite a lively old girl; in fact, she was the life of the party on Friday night. No going to bed for her until the last guest had gone – at 4:00 a.m.!

The first paragraph, though it talks about a lively elderly woman, conveys a distinctly unlively impression by its monotonous style. The style of the second, by contrast, conveys in itself some of Aunt Hue's liveliness.

As you doubtless know, sentences come in four basic types:

- declarative sentences, which make assertions
- interrogative sentences, which ask questions
- imperative sentences, which give commands
- exclamatory sentences, which make exclamations

Good writers use all four types judiciously for variety and effect.

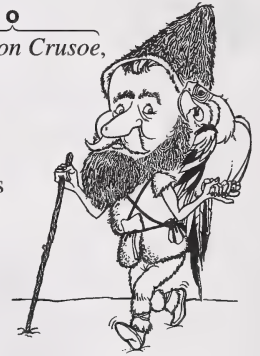
But even these four basic sentence types admit of a great deal of variety. As an example, here's a declarative sentence – by far the most common type in most writing. Most simple declarative sentences follow the basic pattern of subject – verb – object, with modifiers appearing at appropriate places.

- The ^sdog ^vchased the ^ocat.

- ^sMiss Sawchuck, ^{modifier}falling into a rage, ^vthrew ^ome ^{modifier}out of class.

- ^{modifier}The eighteenth century English writer ^sDaniel Defoe ^vwrote ^o*Robinson Crusoe*,
^{modifier}a book that some feel was the first real novel.

However, good writers regularly shift this usual order for extra emphasis of some important idea or simply to avoid monotony. Different parts of sentences can be shifted, as the following examples show:



Usual Order

I have never seen a more enjoyable movie.

Thérèse loves her work above everything else.

A blinding light then appeared out of nowhere.

Louie's car is the fastest here, even if it is the oldest.

Shifted Order

Never have I seen a more enjoyable movie.

Above everything else Thérèse loves her work.

Then out of nowhere appeared a blinding light.

Louie's car, even if it is the oldest, is the fastest one here.

or

Even if it is the oldest one here, Louie's car is the fastest.

Hans came down right on his sprained ankle.

Down came Hans, right on his sprained ankle.

Shifting your word order from time to time will add interest to your writing, but be careful not to create awkward sentences in the process.

Loose Sentences and Periodic Sentences

Periodic sentence: a sentence in which the main idea comes at the end

A sentence in which the central idea appears at the end is called a **periodic sentence**. Such a sentence forces readers to wait for the main thought until they've read all the details on which it's based. The effect, therefore, is one of suspense. By contrast, a sentence that gives the main idea first and then adds to it is called a **loose sentence**. It doesn't create suspense.

Compare these sentences:

Loose sentence: a sentence in which the main idea comes at the beginning

- I passed the exam, though I had a bad cold, was extremely nervous, and had slept badly the night before. (**loose**)
- Although I had a bad cold, was extremely nervous, and had slept badly the night before, I passed the exam. (**periodic**)
- I simply abhor insects, though I can tolerate ladybugs and butterflies. (**loose**)
- Although I can tolerate ladybugs and butterflies, I simply abhor insects. (**periodic**)



Periodic sentences, like any sentences with shifted constructions, add variety and interest to your writing if you use them well. They're far less commonly used than loose sentences, but the result is that their effect is that much greater.

Sentence Length

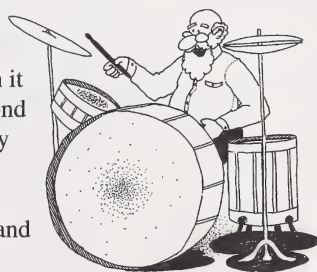
Sentence length is another way of achieving variety in writing. A passage that contains sentences all roughly the same length is monotonous. If they're all long, the passage becomes ponderous. If they're all short, it becomes choppy and infantile. If they're of medium length, it may simply be dull. By contrast, a short, abrupt sentence inserted after several longer ones will instantly catch the reader's attention. A couple in a row, if wisely placed, will almost certainly pick up the pace of a piece of writing.

Rhythm

When people think of rhythm in writing, they usually think of poetry, which generally has a stronger rhythm than does prose. But good creative prose writing, too, has rhythm; it's what makes prose flow smoothly.

Reread the two paragraphs about Aunt Hue that appeared at the beginning of the discussion of sentence varieties. Note how the second paragraph has a much stronger and more pleasing rhythm than the first one. The first is jerky and sounds as though it has been written by an elementary student. What makes the second flow so much more smoothly? Variety is the chief thing – variety of sentence structure and sentence length. It also has transitional devices that smooth out jumps from one thought to another. Finally, it simply has **cadence** – a pleasing sequence of stressed and unstressed syllables that creates a rhythm when read.

Cadence: a sequence of stressed and unstressed syllables that creates a rhythm

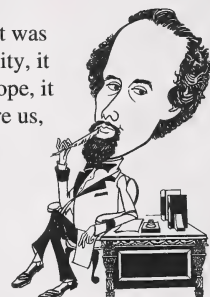


When reading prose passages, be alert for their rhythm. In writing your own, strive for a pleasing rhythm. Don't go overboard and try to create a sing-song effect; just use variety wisely, keep your ear tuned to what you're writing, and the rhythm should take care of itself.

Clause: a word grouping that has a subject and predicate (or verb)

One way of achieving a pleasing rhythm is to use parallel structures from time to time; that is, to juxtapose sentences or **clauses** of precisely the same length and structure. While this normally makes for a dull style, good writers can occasionally achieve an interesting effect, and emphasize a point, by doing it deliberately. Read the following lines that open Charles Dickens' novel *A Tale of Two Cities*:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.



Parallelism: the juxtaposing of sentences or parts of sentences of exactly the same length, structure, and weight so as to achieve a sense of balance

This sort of structure is called **parallelism**; while Dickens chose not to punctuate his parallel clauses as individual sentences, he could have. The use of parallelism of sentences or clauses within sentences can lend a great deal of punch to a piece of writing – if not overdone. Consider using this technique, along with a variety of sentence types and lengths, as you draft the body of your essay. Refer to your handbook for a much fuller discussion of how to improve the impact of your sentence structures. Look up “sentences” in the index.

Imagery and Figurative Language



Imagery and figurative language! Isn't that stuff we do when we get to poetry?

It certainly will be dealt with at greater length in the poetry module – Module 4 – but it's important to remember that good prose writers, too, use vivid images and figures of speech like metaphors, similes, and personification to make their writing concrete and colourful.





To see writing of this sort done by a master, turn again to Dylan Thomas's "A Child's Christmas in Wales" on page 270 of *Literary Experiences* and read all or part of this essay.

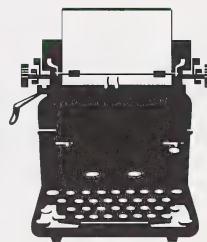
9. In Section 1 you thought about writers' styles in a rather general sense. The fact is that style in writing depends to a great degree on such factors as sentence types, paragraph structures, and the use of devices like parallelism, imagery, and figurative language.

Turn back to the essays you've read so far in this course and find examples of the following:

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| a. vivid imagery | f. an exclamatory sentence |
| b. a metaphor or simile | g. a very short paragraph |
| c. parallelism | h. a long sentence juxtaposed next to a short one |
| d. a periodic sentence | i. any other interesting and unusual sentence structure |
| e. an interrogative sentence | |

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 1.

10. Now it's time to put into practice some of the techniques you've been studying. At this point you should be prepared to write the body of your personal essay. Take the time you need, and produce your first draft now. You'll work at revising and editing it in the next activity.



Writing an Effective Conclusion

Like an introduction, a conclusion to an essay should be neither too abrupt nor too long-winded. In a short essay it may be just a sentence or two in the final paragraph, but more often a conclusion should be allotted a paragraph of its own.

A conclusion should do two things:

- create a sense of finality and completeness
- refer somehow to the central idea of the paper (Though in a personal essay even this isn't necessary if your conclusion creates a satisfying sense of finality.)

Here are three hints that may help you write a good conclusion:

- Try to have the conclusion develop naturally. It should not appear tacked on as an afterthought.
- Avoid clichés like *To sum up...* or *In closing let me state...*
- Don't ramble on or become wordy. When you've said what you have to say, stop.

Sample Concluding Techniques

There are many ways of writing the conclusion of an essay. Here are a few techniques which, if used properly, can make for interesting conclusions.

- You can summarize the central idea of the composition. Here's an example:

It is clear, then, that the causes of the Second World War can be traced back to the harsh terms in the Treaty of Versailles of 1919. Had Germany not been treated so badly then, very likely the conditions that allowed for Hitler's rise to power would never have occurred.



- You can refer to your title.

The return of the whooping crane is one of the few success stories in the struggle to prevent the extinction of endangered species. The process, however, has been a slow one, and the number of whoopers is still small. It will be a long time before their survival is assured.

– “The Return of the Whooping Crane”

- You can ask a question.

Despite the evidence we have examined, the fact is that no hard, indisputable proof of the existence of the sasquatch has yet been produced. No doubt some hardy soul will simply have to go out and bring back an animal to establish its reality. Perhaps the person to do this will be someone who has read this essay. Might you be the one?

- You can bring up a final major point if your essay is a short one.

I'll wrap up with one last thought. Although genealogy can be an absorbing and rewarding hobby, don't take it too seriously. It may be fun to know who our ancestors were and where they came from, but you shouldn't let this lead to an obsessive fascination with yourself and your roots. What really matters is that you are able to deal effectively with the problems that face our society today. Enjoy tracing your family tree as a hobby, but remember it is just that – a hobby.

- You can end with a quotation; direct or indirect.

Running your own small business is, as you have seen, a challenge few people are willing to meet, but one with potential for great rewards. Here is how one successful entrepreneur put it:



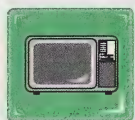
I work sixteen hours a day and haven't taken a holiday in five years. I carry a tremendous debt load, and I must cope with constant fluctuations in consumer demand and costs of operation. I know that any day new competitors may appear on the scene. What's more, I pay myself a salary I can barely live off. But I'm my own boss – and I wouldn't have it any other way.

Of course, as in the case of introductions, there are many other ways in which an imaginative writer can conclude a paper. These examples are included just to give you a few ideas.

11. Now write the conclusion of your essay. Try to tie up loose ends and leave your readers with a feeling of satisfaction.

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following ideas.



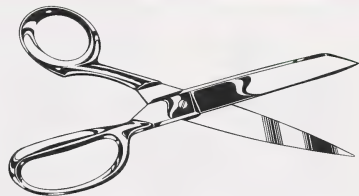
Of course it isn't just written nonfiction works that require effective introductions and conclusions. Try watching a documentary on television, noting in particular how it begins and ends. How does the introduction and conclusion relate to the content of the show? What techniques are used to grab viewers' attention and wrap things up? In what ways do beginnings and endings in nonfiction works – be they print materials or television productions – seem to work similarly?

The rough draft of your essay should now be complete. In Activity 2 you'll work at editing and revising it.

Activity 2: Revising and Editing



By this point you should have produced the first draft of your personal essay. Now it's time to revise and edit it.



Revising Your Essay

If you're studying in a situation in which you can work with a partner or in a small group, this is an excellent way to approach the revision stage of your essay. You can critique each other's first drafts, pointing out strengths and weaknesses and suggesting ways in which each draft can be improved.

Whether you're working with a partner, in a small group, or on your own, what follows are suggestions for some of the things to look for at the revision stage. Refer, as well to the Revision Checklist you were given in Section 2: Activity 2 of Module 1. (Note that the suggestions are presented as though you're revising your own essay; they speak of "your style" or "your voice." Everything suggested applies, of course, to anyone's first draft you may be critiquing.)

Tone and Style

First, check to see that the tone you've taken and the style you've adopted are appropriate to your intended audience. Is your level of language suitable? Is it consistent?

Voice

Does your essay speak with your own voice? Does it sound as if you really care about your topic? Have you written what you really think and feel? Does your writing style reflect your interest? Is it lively and entertaining? Does it sound like **you**?

Unity

Unity: in writing, a singleness of purpose or focus

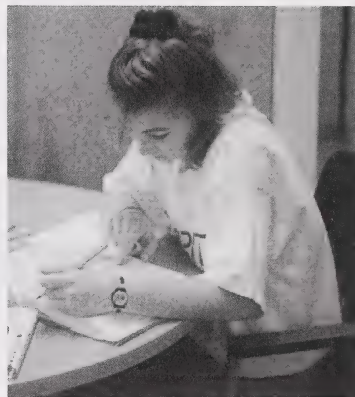
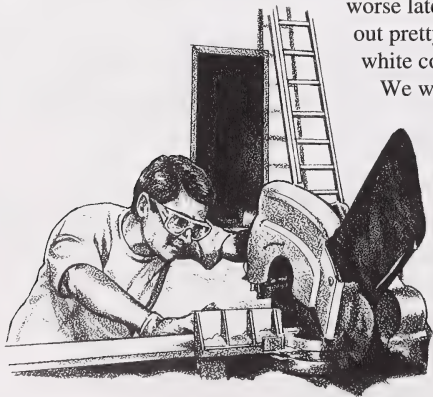
Unity means a singleness of purpose or focus. An essay – or anything you write – should have a specific focus, and you shouldn't stray from it. Likewise, each paragraph within the larger piece should develop a single topic and present it as a unified whole. When revising, check that each paragraph stays on topic – usually dictated by the topic sentence. Check also that each paragraph contributes as it should to the topic of the essay itself. Extraneous material will make for a vague, rambling style that will discourage reader interest.

1. Following is a paragraph that lacks unity. Rewrite it so that it clearly has a single focus. You may omit extraneous information, change sentence subjects, or anything that you feel necessary to bring unity into the paragraph.

Last winter we finished our basement so I could move down there. We began by framing the walls; that was a job Dad and I did together. Then Mum did the wiring. Dad stays away from electricity ever since his accident; you should see how nervous he gets around any wiring job now! When the wiring was done, I put in the fibreglass insulation. That's an easy job, but an itchy one. I much preferred installing styrofoam insulation, which I did in Aunt Olga's cottage two summers ago. Next came putting up the drywall and the taping, mudding, and sanding that goes along with that job. Mum and Dad did most of it together, but Dad did the sanding because Mum gets asthma with all that dust. Her asthma's been getting much

worse lately, I think. Drywalling's a tricky job, but it turned out pretty nicely. I painted the walls myself – a soft off-white colour – and Dad and Mum put down the linoleum.

We were going to have carpets for warmth but Mum thought lino would be easier to keep clean, and it's better for her asthma, at least according to her doctor, who I don't really think knows much. We still haven't installed a suspended ceiling, so I'm living with all the joists and wires and insulation exposed; but we'll get around to it one of these days. It's funny, isn't it, how you can learn to live with things; for example, I never see the mess in my room because I'm used to it. I think the same thing's happening with my ceiling.



Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 2.

Coherence

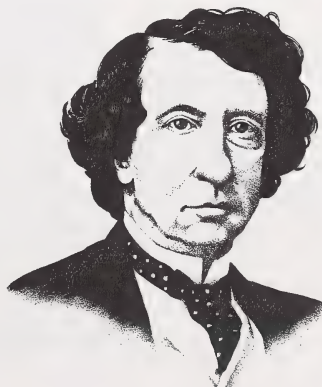
Unity alone isn't enough to ensure a well-written essay. What you write must also have **coherence**.

Coherence: in writing, the clear connection of ideas and details



There are four basic methods of achieving coherence over and above simply arranging your work in a logical order. They are as follows:

- Repeat key nouns and verbs frequently. If you start to sound too repetitive in doing this, substitute synonyms. For example, in a research paper on Sir John A. Macdonald, you could frequently repeat such key nouns as *Macdonald*, *Sir John*, and *the Prime Minister*.
- Use pronouns frequently to refer back to key nouns. For example, in the paper on Macdonald, clearly the appropriate personal pronouns to repeat frequently would be *he*, *him*, and *his*.



Transitional expression: a word or phrase used to link ideas

- Use the demonstrative adjectives *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those* to make it clear exactly to what or to whom you're referring. For example, "that decision," "these reasons."
- Use connecting words and phrases – generally called **transitional expressions** – to make connections that might otherwise be unclear. Examples of transitional expressions are the words *however*, *also*, *nevertheless*, and *but*, and the phrases *such as*, *for example*, *in fact*, and *at the same time*. If used properly, such expressions not only clarify connections and relationships between ideas and facts, but also make for smoother, less choppy, and more pleasing writing. Here's an example:

To make the matter clear, *however*, I *also* must point out that I do agree with you in part. *Nevertheless*, on the whole I think you are wrong. *For example*, you seem unable to give reasons for several of your points. *In fact*, you seldom defend your ideas at all. *In spite of* this, *though*, this report is better than your last one.



For more information about coherence and transitional expressions, refer to your handbook. Look in the index under "Transitions," "Paragraphs," and "Coherence."

When revising your rough draft, check closely for the quality of coherence. Use the methods presented above to increase the coherence of your writing.

2. Following is a paragraph that's choppy and lacks coherence. Using any techniques you wish, rewrite the paragraph so that it has coherence, reads smoothly, and makes clear sense.

The English language is the richest language in the world. Other languages don't even have such a thing as a thesaurus. Other languages don't have as many synonyms as the English language. The English language has many synonyms. It has borrowed heavily from other languages. This is because of the language's history. The roots of the English language go back to the Germanic Saxon language. The Saxon language gave us most of our concise, one-syllable words with strong consonant sounds. Examples of these words are *man*, *book*, and *cow*. In the seventh century the Vikings invaded England. The Vikings brought their language with them. Many of their words entered the English language. Examples of Viking words are words with the "sk" sound like *skirt* and *sky*. In 1066 the French-speaking Normans conquered England. For hundreds of years all the nobility in England spoke French. The French-speaking nobles adopted the English language, and the French language died out. Many French words had entered the English language. English has absorbed many Latin and Greek terms. Many of the Latin and Greek words are used in the sciences. English is a very rich language. The language's richness allows English speakers to express many shades of meaning. Other languages cannot do this or cannot do it as well.



Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 2.

Emphasis and Proportion

Emphasis: in writing, the stressing of central ideas or words through placement, repetition, or other methods

The giving of prominence to ideas that are important in your writing is called **emphasis**, another essential of good writing. As with unity and coherence, you should strive for emphasis at all levels of your writing – in sentences, paragraphs, and full compositions. Read these three sentences:

- Karl passed to Naomi when no one was looking for a shot on goal.
- When no one was looking, Karl passed to Naomi for a shot on goal.
- The puck was passed to Naomi by Karl for a shot on goal when no one was looking.

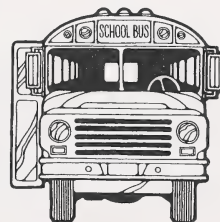


Of the three sentences, which is the most interesting? Which is the least interesting? If you read each carefully, no doubt you feel that the second sentence is the most exciting and that the third sentence is the dullest. Why?

The reason is simple: the second sentence is written so as to give prominence to the important idea. It brings home the fact that one saw the sneak pass – the aspect of the play that makes it interesting – by putting it at the beginning of the sentence. In the first sentence this fact is buried in the middle, sandwiched between two other ideas. In the third sentence things are made even worse by changing the verb from the active to the passive voice (active voice: “Karl passed the puck”; passive voice: “The puck was passed by Karl”).

Proper emphasis of ideas is important not only in individual sentences but also in paragraphs and larger compositions. The principles, though, are the same. Whenever you write, bear in mind precisely what it is you wish to emphasize, and structure your work accordingly. The use of periodic sentences, parallel structures, repetition, and the active voice are all techniques writers use to achieve emphasis. Getting rid of unnecessary wordiness helps too.

3. Rewrite the following sentences so as to make them more emphatic. Use any techniques you wish.
- a. Jean-Luc screeched to a stop when the moose stepped onto the road.
 - b. The purse snatcher was tackled by old Mrs. Swensen right on the sidewalk.
 - c. My motto is that to live is to work and also that working is living.
 - d. It is one of the rules of this school that no one can park in the bus lane.



Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 2.

Proportion: in writing, the development of each part of a composition according to its importance

The **proportion** of the whole composition that is allotted to the different ideas you wish to include is closely related to emphasis. The principle of proportion requires you to develop each section of a paper, or each part of a paragraph within the paper, according to its relative importance. Naturally your most important points should be given proportionally the most detailed treatment, so it's necessary always to keep your purpose in mind. This will help you determine what to expand, what to contract, and what to omit completely. An outline will help greatly with this task.

Here are some hints to help you determine if what you're writing is properly proportioned.

- Keep reminding yourself what your purpose is and who your readers will be.
 - Be willing to omit information if you find it doesn't bear directly on the central topic of your essay, even if you find the information intrinsically interesting.
 - Be willing to shorten paragraphs that don't carry their weight.
 - Avoid developing ideas likely to be familiar to your readers.
 - Make sure your most important ideas are developed most fully.
 - If an assignment calls for a certain number of words, make an estimate of the number of words you'll allot to each topic you intend to cover.
4. The chart that follows contains a list of suggested topics for a three-thousand-word research paper on the use of drugs by track and field athletes. In the space provided after each, tell approximately how many words you'd devote to that topic. Ask yourself two questions for each one:
- What proportion of the paper should this topic comprise?
 - Should it be omitted entirely?

When the words are totalled, that total should be three thousand. The first topic has been done as an example.



WESTFILE INC.

Drug Use Among Track and Field Athletes	
Topics	Approximate Number of Words
• a brief history of track and field events	0
• the principal track and field events	
• the factors that lead to drug use by track and field athletes	
• training techniques of modern athletes	
• nutritional needs of athletes	
• the principal drugs used by track and field athletes	
• tests used to determine drug use	
• possible side effects of drugs	
• problems of enforcing drug rules	
• the drug problems in other sports	
• suggestions for dealing with the problem	
Total number of words	3000

Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 2.

When revising your essay, keep a close eye on its emphasis and proportion.

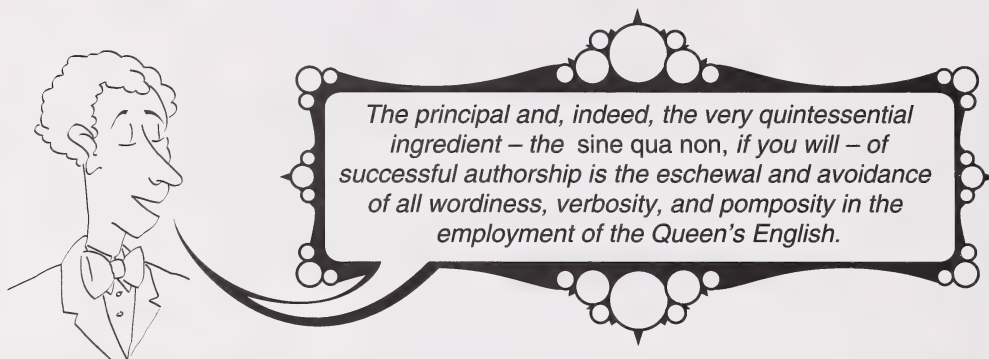
Diction

At the beginning of this activity you were advised to examine the style and tone of your rough draft, and part of this process is looking at your diction – especially your level of language. But diction also involves specific word choices. At this point it might help to run through a few specific things to look for in examining this aspect of your diction.

Wordiness

Wordiness is one aspect of inappropriate diction of which most people are guilty. Too often writers express ideas in convoluted ways when simple, straightforward English would be much more effective.

Wordiness is the presence of useless words (deadwood) that clutter up a sentence. These words add nothing to the sentence, yet detract from the message by hiding the valuable words among so many unnecessary ones. To improve your writing, express your ideas in the most direct way possible. Be on guard, for wordiness can easily creep into your writing.



Repetition and Redundancy

Repetition is a specific type of wordiness. In repetition a word or phrase is repeated unnecessarily. Needless repetition in your writing is easily noticed and easily remedied, and is something to look out for at the revision stage. Deliberate repetition for emphasis is, of course, an entirely different matter.

Redundancy is the pointless repetition of an idea rather than of a word. You may need to restate an idea for clarity or emphasis. But redundancies are awkward and illogical. Consider the following examples:

- bisect ~~in-half~~
- modern life ~~of today~~
- ~~vital~~ essentials
- a ~~positive~~ gain
- He hanged himself, ~~thereby taking his own life~~.

Formula phrases are a specific type of redundancy. They involve the use of frequently used phrases and expressions that are, in fact, totally unnecessary. Look for ready-made phrases when revising your essay; here are a few examples:

- Sara was attractive ~~in appearance~~.
- Marianna is an expert in ~~the field of~~ biology.
- That is the reason ~~why~~ I did not come.
- He was there at that ~~point in~~ time.
- The reason was ~~because of~~ lack of rain.

Clichés

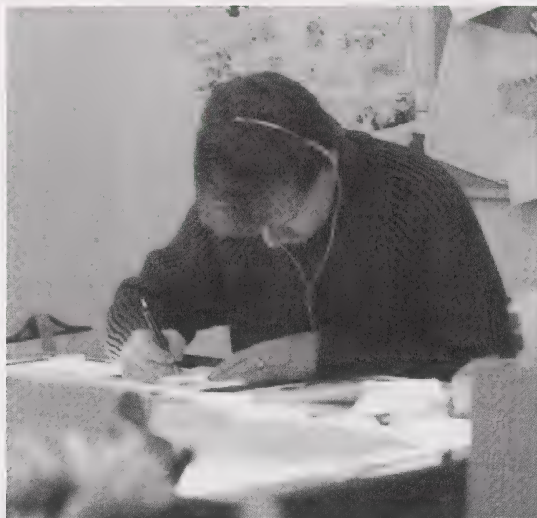
Cliché: a once-colourful expression that has lost its meaning through overuse

A closely related type of wordiness is the more general **cliché** or trite expression. The inexperienced writer often uses these overused, stale descriptions because they're heard so often and come to mind so easily. Expressions like "clear as mud," "good as gold," and "last but not least" are all examples of clichés.

No doubt you're familiar with many clichés like these. You hear them frequently in day-to-day conversation; and if your essay contains conversation between characters, clichés may add realism to your writing (remember the clichés Mrs. Hax used in "Dancing Bear" and what they told the reader about her). In most compositions, however, correct informal or formal language is required, and clichés lose their value. Although once fresh, unique expressions, they're now so common that they possess little meaning or effect. While clichés can speed up conversations and fill awkward pauses, they shouldn't be used much in writing, where you have more time to think.

5. Rewrite the following sentences to eliminate wordiness, clichés, redundancies, and needless repetitions.
- a. Looking ahead into the future, we see better conditions in the medical situations of developing nations.
 - b. Pop is a kind of music that has a very powerful, strong beat.
 - c. To be frank about it, today an inadequacy can lay the groundwork for ruination of people in later life when it occurs in education.
 - d. The really rather strange looking object was ten feet tall in height and nearly fourteen feet around in circumference.
 - e. From dawn till dusk they were busy as bees repairing the devastating damage of the blazing inferno.
 - f. The ripe tomato was soft feeling and bright red in colour.
 - g. After his election defeat, Helmut thought it was time to throw in the towel.
 - h. It was while he was practising playing his saxophone that Jan heard an unusual noise.
 - i. The fact that we are products of our environmental context ensures that each of us had deeply ingrained within the fibre of our being preconceived ideas that influence all our actions and reactions.
 - j. Needless to say, Colette was conspicuous by her absence.
 - k. Elliot totally lacked the ability to keep a secret.
 - l. We left in a hurry due to the fact that it had stated to rain.
 - m. Until such time as people start to care about others, big cities will have depressed socio-economic areas.
 - n. Ashley and Beth are acquainted with each other, I believe.
 - o. All the acreage owners, with the exception of the Olsons, haul their garbage to the sanitary landfill site.

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 2.

Writer's Handbook


Your handbook can be an invaluable resource during the revision process of a piece of writing. Check under headings such as diction, tone, sentences, and paragraphs. A good handbook can supply a great deal more detailed information than can be given here.

6. Now you should be ready to revise your essay, with or without the help of a partner or group. Remember, you just may end up having to rewrite your first draft almost completely. Take all the time you need, and don't go on to the next stage until you've got a good, revised copy of your essay.

Editing and Proofreading

Writer's Handbook


The final stage of preparing your essay for its finished copy is that of editing and proofreading – the stage at which you go over your work for mechanical glitches. Your primary resource when editing should be your handbook.



Ms. Jensen, I have a problem with that. A handbook may be great for correcting grammatical errors, for example, but it's not much use if you don't know what your weaknesses are in grammar in the first place.

I agree. Unless someone points out and says "I think that's a grammar mistake," how do I know what to look up?



Those are fair criticisms. And for those reasons I always recommend using a partner at this stage, if it's at all possible, to point out mechanical errors in your work. If you're working alone, try to get a friend or family member to proofread your revised copy.

If you do get a partner to help, don't just rely on that person to correct your mistakes. Be sure you understand why you went wrong; use your handbook for complete explanations.

Time and space don't permit a run-through of the possible mechanical problems you may run into; you're probably already aware of your own areas of weakness. If one of these areas is sentence structure, be sure to do the Extra Help for this section.

7. With the help of a friend or partner if possible, revise and proofread the revised copy of your essay. You'll be submitting your finished copy as part of your Section 2 Assignment.

Follow-up Activities

If you found the activities difficult, you should complete the Extra Help. If you understand the concepts clearly, you should complete the Enrichment.

Extra Help

Writing Complete Sentences



In this section you've looked at the use of effective sentence structure as an element of good writing style. You've examined how varying the type and length of sentences, and shifting their word order, can create a pleasing rhythm and avoid monotony. Here you'll pick up the subject of sentence structure again, and look at a few points in more depth.

Anyone wishing to develop an acceptable writing style must make sure to write in complete sentences. For many people, writing in complete sentences is as natural as breathing. They've attuned their ears to the rhythm of English and are unpleasantly jarred when they read an incomplete sentence, or two sentences strung together. For other people, knowing what is and what isn't a sentence is a real problem. If you've been finding that your teachers constantly point out sentence fragments and run-on sentences in the work you do, pay particularly close attention to the discussion that follows.

What is a complete sentence? The traditional definition is that a sentence contains a subject and a verb, as in this example:

The ^sdog ^vbarked.

Modifiers may be added to this basic sentence without changing the fundamental structure, as in this example:

The vicious ^sdog with the foaming mouth and fiery eyes ^vbarked ferociously at the tormenting boys, clearly wanting nothing more than to sink his fangs into their taunting hands.



The problem with this definition, however, is that there are exceptions. For example, these are all sentences:

- Help!
- Thank you.
- When?
- What a great meal!
- Do or die!
- Yes.
- Me?
- Stop that.

Major sentence:
a word grouping
containing a
subject and verb
that can stand
alone
grammatically

Sentences complete with subject and verb are often called **major sentences**. By contrast, **minor sentences** are complete sentences that can stand on their own, even though they lack a subject or verb or both. All the examples in the preceding list are minor sentences – except the last, which is an imperative (with an implied subject: “**You** stop that.”). Major sentences can normally make sense on their own, but minor sentences normally require a context. “Thank you,” “Yes,” and “Me?” don’t make much sense unless you know what’s gone on just before.

Minor sentence:
a word grouping
that can act as a
sentence even
though it lacks a
subject and/or a
predicate

Minor sentences are usually of four types:

- exclamations (Wow!)
- commonly known expressions (Do or die!)
- questions and answers (When? Last week,)
- stylistic devices (Trapped! That’s how I felt. . .)

Because of these exceptions, a definition of *sentence* that’s broader than the traditional one is required. *The Canadian Writer’s Handbook* defines a sentence as a “satisfyingly complete pattern of intonation or expression: i.e., a complete utterance.” In other words, if an experienced reader, tuned into the rhythms of the language, feels that a complete utterance has been made, that utterance is a sentence.

Sentence Fragments

Sentence fragment: an incomplete sentence mistakenly presented as a sentence

If a sentence is a satisfying, complete utterance, a **sentence fragment** is an incomplete, unsatisfying utterance. It leaves the reader hanging, expecting more. Sensitivity to this feeling of incompleteness is necessary to ensure that you don’t write sentence fragments.

There are three common causes of sentence fragments:

- setting off a **phrase** as a sentence

A phrase is a group of words that does not contain the two essential elements of a major sentence – a subject and a predicate (verb) – yet functions as a grammatical unit within a sentence. There is a variety of types of phrases, such as prepositional, participial, and infinitive phrases. (For more information, look up *phrases* in your handbook.)

Incorrect: Dana having repaired the bike.

Correct: Dana, having repaired the bike, completed her tour.

Phrase: a word grouping, acting as a unit, that lacks a subject or predicate



Sentence fragments leave the reader hanging.

Dependent clause: see Subordinate clause

- setting off a **dependent clause** as a sentence

A clause is a group of words that contains a subject and predicate. Some clauses can serve as complete major sentences, as in this example:

– Miss Marchand ^sdrove ^vthe bus.

Such a clause is called an **independent clause**, because it can stand alone as a sentence.

Other clauses, though they contain a subject and a verb, cannot stand as sentences. They are called **subordinate clauses** or dependent clauses, and like phrases, can serve only as parts of sentences. Here are some examples:

– because he ^sran ^vthe race

– when I ^sget ^vthere

– who is ^sstanding ^vby the door

(For more information, look up *clauses* in your handbook.)

Incorrect: When suddenly Simone appeared at my door.

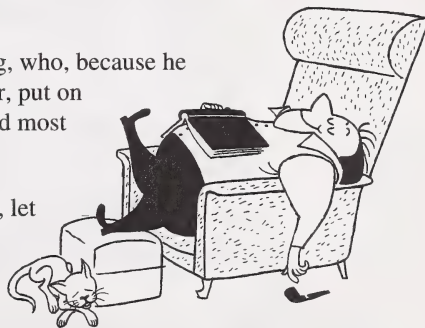
Correct: I thought I was all alone when suddenly Simone appeared at my door.

People who have trouble with sentence fragments often present subordinate clauses as complete sentences. Such clauses, being dependent on other clauses for their meanings, cannot normally be used in this way except, in some contexts, as minor sentences.

- beginning a statement with one construction and then stopping or shifting to another

Incorrect: My father, an athlete when young, who, because he let himself go as he became older, put on so much weight and then to spend most of his time in an easy chair.

Correct: My father, an athlete when young, let himself go as he became older, and put on so much weight that he had to spend most of his time in an easy chair.



Writer's Handbook



Writer's Handbook



If you have a problem with sentence fragments, turn to the discussion of them in your handbook. Look in your index under *sentences*. Then do the work that follows.

Hint: One good way of catching sentence fragments in your own writing at the editing and proofreading stage is to read each sentence by itself, starting with the last one and moving one-by-one back to the first.

1. Rewrite each of the following to correct any sentence fragments. If one is acceptable as it stands, write *correct*.
 - a. Winter having some late that year. We had a barbecue on Christmas Day.
 - b. Kaitlin is always wrapped up in herself. Without any regard for others.
 - c. I have two reasons for going. To meet new people and to get some exercise.
 - d. The horse ran faster and faster. Her mane swept back and her nostrils flaring.
 - e. Come here and straighten your room.
 - f. Ted having won the prize.
 - g. We talked to the scientist. Who's convinced there's life on other planets.
 - h. When all at once this guy jumps me.
 - i. Wanda Laing, who's singing with the Bud Lee Band, having finished her set, walked off the stage, tripped, and broke her ankle.
 - j. Wow! A three-day pass!



Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Extra Help.

Run-on Sentences

Run-on sentence: two or more independent clauses run together as one sentence

Another error to watch for is that of the **run-on** (or fused) **sentence**. A run-on sentence is made up of two or more independent clauses written as one sentence.

Run-on Sentence: Adele went to the swim meet she won first prize in the two hundred metre butterfly.

Corrected Sentence: Adele went to the swim meet. She won first prize in the two hundred metre butterfly.



This is a very common error, and one that often occurs along with sentence fragments. A sensitivity to the completeness of an utterance is again what's needed to avoid writing fused, or run-on, sentences.

*Comma splice:
two or more
independent
clauses joined
with a comma*

Probably the most common type of run-on sentence is the **comma splice**, which occurs when two or more independent clauses are joined together with only a comma.

Comma Splice: The course was much more interesting than I had expected, I found I never even wanted to skip a class.

Corrected Sentence: The course was much more interesting than I had expected. I found I never even wanted to skip a class.

or

The course was much more interesting than I had expected; I found I never even wanted to skip a class.

One common sort of comma splice occurs when conjunctive adverbs are used in a sentence. These adverbs – *therefore, however, besides, consequently, furthermore, moreover, likewise, still, nevertheless, and then* – are not conjunctions that can legitimately join two clauses into a sentence. They require the use of a semicolon, not a comma, when they join two independent clauses, as this example shows:

Incorrect (comma splice): We had travelled all night, therefore we were exhausted.

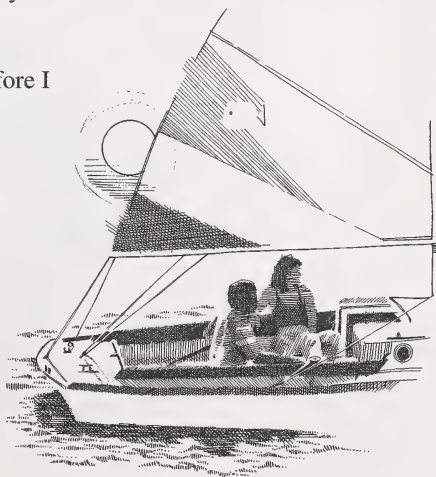
Correct: We had travelled all night; therefore, we were exhausted.

Note that the semicolon goes before the conjunctive adverb, not after it.

If run-on sentences and comma splices give you problems, look them up in the index of your handbook for further explanation; then do the work that follows.

2. Rewrite the following sentences so as to correct any run-ons and comma splices.

- a. No one told me that the plane was early therefore I wasn't at the airport to meet her.
- b. I don't much like being at the lake, it's getting there that I enjoy.
- c. There was nothing there, everything looked untouched.
- d. I enjoy playing soccer, however I find baseball boring.
- e. We set sail at daybreak, the wind had died down and the clouds had dissipated.



Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Extra Help.

Writer's
Handbook



Variety in Sentence Structures

Once a writer is comfortable with what is and isn't a grammatically correct sentence, the next thing is to try to make his or her sentences more interesting by varying their length and structure – something that was discussed in this section.

3. For more practice at this sort of thing, rearrange the sentences that follow to make them more lively. As well as shifting phrases and clauses, make any other minor changes necessary to avoid awkward constructions.
 - a. Azim accepted his brother's offer before he had a chance to withdraw it.
 - b. Grace had seldom played the cello as well as she did that evening.
 - c. The hot-air balloon floated up through the clouds.
 - d. Leo, an unusually talented writer, has had several of his stories published already.
 - e. I had never seen such reprehensible behaviour before.



Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Extra Help.

Ineffective Wording

Recent studies have shown that while most English 30 students have a general control of basic grammar and the mechanics of writing, they often have a tendency to use imprecise and often convoluted wordings. The problem is caused by a number of factors, among them these:

- the habit of using clichés
- an attempt to impress the reader with a big vocabulary and a wordy style
- the belief that **euphemisms** sound better than more direct words
- the habit of using **jargon**
- the belief that repetition will make a point clearer

Euphemism: a mild, indirect way of expressing something – for example, saying passed away instead of died

Jargon: language of a special group that is not easily understood by outsiders

4. Each of the following sentences is less effective than it should be. Rewrite each so as to make it a stronger, more effective sentence.
 - a. These were the very things he hoped to avoid: his pain and his grief.
 - b. The novel *Lord of the Flies* concerns a group of young children, all boys, who revert back to savagery.
 - c. Anna felt grateful and thankful to have a chance of taking advantage of the opportunity of getting a good education.
 - d. Due to the fact that I was late, I decided I ought to make a phone call, which I did.

- e. At this point in time the answer is categorically and unequivocally no.
- f. From out of the blue the fire chief produced tangible proof that the terrible tragedy was caused by the work of a crazed pyromaniac.
- g. There were three people who came to the party.
- h. Upon receiving an answer in the affirmative, he proceeded to the bulletin board.
- i. Old Mr. Tymchuk was laid to rest on Friday, three days after he went to his final reward.
- j. I want you to try and count the amount of pencils in the classroom being that there may not be enough and we'll run short.

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Extra Help.

Whenever you write, try to make your wording as effective as possible. Avoid trite, overworked, and convoluted expressions; get to the point and say what you want to say in clear, direct English.

Enrichment

Do **one** or **both** of the following.

1. In Activity 1 under the subheading Writing Interesting Sentences, it was suggested that you take a look at Dylan Thomas's autobiographical essay "A Child's Christmas in Wales" to see what an accomplished writer can achieve with imagery, figurative language, and sentence structures. While Thomas deliberately bends many of the rules of essay writing, few writers have ever achieved the wonderfully rich, sensual effects that he seems to produce so effortlessly.



If you didn't read this essay earlier, or if you read only part of it, find a comfortable spot where you won't be interrupted for a while and sink into the rich, luxurious world Thomas has created with his vivid imagery and concrete details. See what a master stylist can accomplish – and how close to poetry prose writing can come.



2. If you can get hold of a copy from your local media centre, watch the videotape *Non-Fiction*, number 4 in the ACCESS Network series *Communicating with a Purpose* (#VC213204). This half-hour video will take you through the basics of a range of nonfiction writing, ending with the essay. It discusses such things as academic writing, legal and technical writing, and journalism, and focuses on such things as style, audience, and level of language.

Conclusion

In Section 2 you've worked on developing your own personal essay. The activities in the section took you step-by-step through the essay-writing process, but left the ideas, the style – in fact, all the creative aspects of writing a personal essay – up to you. With the revised and edited copy of your essay completed, you've gone a long way toward completing your Section 2 Assignment.

Assignment
Booklet

ASSIGNMENT

In your Assignment Booklet complete the assignment for this section.

MODULE SUMMARY



In this module you've looked at the essay both as a literary genre to be enjoyed and as a type of writing to be mastered. If you've enjoyed the essays you've read in this module, look for other collections of personal essays to read. There's a whole world of wonderful essays out there waiting to be discovered.

Appendix



Glossary

Suggested Answers

Glossary

allusion: in literature, a reference to someone or something with which the writer assumes readers will be familiar

ambiguity: a play on two meanings the same word may have

anthology: a collection of literary selections by a variety of writers

anticlimax: a sudden shift from something important to something trivial

autobiographical: concerning the writer's own life

cadence: a sequence of stressed and unstressed syllables that creates a rhythm

clause: a word grouping that has a subject and predicate (or verb)

cliché: a once-powerful expression that has lost its meaning through overuse

coherence: in writing, the clear connection of ideas and details

comma splice: two or more independent clauses joined with a comma

dependent clause: see *subordinate clause*

emphasis: in writing, the stressing of central ideas or words through placement, repetition, or other methods

euphemism: a mild indirect way of expressing something – for example, saying someone *passed away* instead of *died*

figurative language: language that uses figures of speech such as metaphors and similes to achieve special effects

implied thesis: a thesis that is never explicitly stated. It's left up to the reader to infer.

incongruity: juxtaposing unlike ideas

independent clause: a clause that can stand alone as a sentence

irreverence: the adoption of a flippant attitude to a serious subject

jargon: language of a special group that is not easily understood by outsiders

loose sentence: a sentence in which the main idea comes at the beginning

major sentence: a word grouping containing a subject and verb that can stand alone grammatically

malapropism: the ridiculous confusion of words that sound somewhat alike ("My father does situps to strengthen his abominable muscles.")

minor sentence: a word grouping that can act as a sentence even though it lacks a subject and/or a predicate

narration: the telling of a story, event, or series of events

organizing principle: in literature, the principle governing how ideas are shaped into a structure

parallelism: the juxtaposing of sentences or parts of sentences of exactly the same length, structure, and weight so as to achieve a sense of balance

periodic sentence: a sentence in which the main idea comes at the end

phrase: a word grouping, acting as a unit, that lacks a subject or predicate

proportion: in writing, the development of each part of a composition according to its importance

run-on sentence: two or more independent clauses run together as one sentence

sentence fragment: an incomplete sentence mistakenly presented as a sentence

style: a writer's way of using language

subordinate clause: a clause that cannot stand alone as a sentence

thesis statement: a statement explicitly expressing the main idea of an essay

topic sentence: a sentence that explicitly states the main idea of a paragraph

unity: in writing, a singleness of purpose or focus

transitional expression: a word or phrase used to link ideas

Suggested Answers

Section 1: Activity 1

- Responses will vary. Goodman's essay is entertaining and reflective, but it could be argued that the writer also hopes to persuade her readers of her ideas. This is certainly not just an informational or descriptive essay. Were you able to explain the reasons for your response?
- If there is an explicit thesis statement in the essay, it's in the final sentence: "... some of our most primitive, deepest instinctual human emotions also give life."

You may have expressed the essay's thesis differently. Here's one possible formulation:

Reason may help us achieve our goals, but it's our irrational desires that set those goals. And at least some of our desires, such as that to have children, are positive and wonderful forces.

- Responses will vary somewhat, but the essay should be placed well to the personal end of the scale. This is an easy-to-read, informal, entertaining essay, written in a conversational style, in which the writer discusses an event in her own life and the lives of two friends.
- Responses will vary. Readers see that Goodman is a person who's sensitive, basically optimistic about life, skeptical of currently popular ideas, and able to think for herself and understand the significance of "minor" details.

Other ideas?

Section 1: Activity 2

- Responses will vary. Goodman's manner is informal and conversational ("you see, . . ."), but her grammar remains correct and standard. She uses an everyday, easy-to-understand vocabulary, but doesn't slip into slang (when using the word *piffle*, she puts quotation marks around it to show that she's borrowing it from another writer). She grounds her story in a commonplace occurrence and adds concrete details to bring it to life ("9 pounds and 1 ounce"). She uses a variety of sentence types and lengths, but never do her structures become convoluted or hard to follow. She uses some figurative language ("like weather reports of a western blizzard"), but for the most part her style is straightforward and matter-of-fact. Her manner could be described as lively, natural, and conversational.

Other ideas?

- Responses will vary. Laurence's style is more formal than Goodman's and somewhat less conversational, but it's still straightforward and easy to understand. Her diction is simple; her sentences offer variety, but never difficulty. She brings in details from her own life to create a personal feeling, though her literary allusions set a slightly more academic tone than Goodman established in her essay. Laurence avoids figurative language in favour of a more direct style.

On the whole her manner might be called direct, slightly academic, personal, reflective.

Other suggestions?

3. Responses will vary. Lessing's style seems honest, direct, precise, and restrained. She uses a level of language that's correct but informal. She sometimes uses contractions, but not always. Her constant use of snippets of conversation gives the essay a conversational tone – at times very colloquial (“... old girl”); however her own commentary steers clear of any slang or colloquialisms. Her diction is at a medium level – very understandable – and her sentences are never long or convoluted. She frequently uses short sentences (“That was 1919.” “He had integrity.”) for emphasis. Nowhere is Lessing's style ponderous, rhetorical, ornate, or artificial; rather, her very frequent use of specific examples makes for a lively, interesting, engaging manner – albeit a serious one.

Other ideas?

4. Responses will vary. Lessing has written a thoughtful, reflective essay that seems to be an honest attempt to come to understand her father as a real human being (not an easy task for a child). Her direct, honest, precise, yet informal style invites the reader to accompany her as she explores her father's character. The mood is reflective and serious, but never dull and ponderous; most readers quickly become genuinely interested in the writer's father; doubtless many go on to question their real understanding of their own parents.

Other ideas?

5. Cameron's style is light and lively, humorous yet never flippant, ironic, yet wistful and reflective. He uses a very relaxed, conversational manner (“I am giving it to you straight.” “You see? You see?”) that quickly captivates readers and entices them to read on, though later in the essay his tone becomes more serious and his style perhaps a touch less ironic. Cameron's reflections on his home town are, in fact serious; it's only his light, lively style that creates the illusion that they aren't. Cameron grounds his reflections in numerous concrete examples that keep readers entertained and alert.
6. Responses will vary. Were you able to explain your preference?
7. Given the age of the students who wrote these paragraphs, both are quite good, but clearly the second one, “Ginger,” has the stronger voice. While the first piece is factual and precise, it lacks enthusiasm; it sounds like something mechanically produced to fulfil an assignment. The second, by contrast, is full of life. The child's love for his dog, the pleasure he takes in talking about her, his use of well-chosen details, his involvement with his paragraph, and his imaginativeness (as in that last sentence) all combine to make for a strong, authentic voice. All his paragraph lacks is a bit of mechanical polish.
8. Were you able to tell which entries were strongest in the quality of voice? Did you notice qualities that characterize your own unique voice? Did you discover areas in which you can work to make your voice stronger?

Section 1: Activity 3

1. Examples, of course, will vary. Here's one example of each type:
- anticlimax – “No citizen can be wantonly tortured, imprisoned, or made to sit through certain Broadway shows.” (This could also be classified as an example of incongruity.)
 - incongruity – “How is it possible to find meaning in a finite world given my waist and shirt size?”
 - exaggeration – “Under their form of totalitarianism, a person merely caught whistling is sentenced to thirty years in a labor camp.”
 - understatement – “Obviously it's not a compliment.”
 - parody - The whole essay is a parody.

- ambiguity – “The government is unresponsive to the needs of the little man. Under five-seven, it is impossible to get your Congressman on the phone.”
 - irreverence – “Did matter begin with an explosion or by the word of God? And if the latter, could He not have begun it just two weeks earlier to take advantage of some of the warmer weather?” (This could also be classified as anticlimax or incongruity.)
 - malapropism – (no examples in the essay)
 - reversal of reader expectations – “One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction.”
2. Allen relies most heavily on the techniques of anticlimax and incongruity (which are, in fact, very closely related). Over and over he creates absurdly funny incongruities by juxtaposing elevated and mundane thoughts, as in this example: “After all, can the human soul be glimpsed through a microscope? Maybe – but you’d definitely need one of those very good ones with two eyepieces.”
3. It’s not easy to deliver a funny speech orally, is it? Professional speakers tend to agree that making people laugh is just about their most challenging task. It depends so much on timing and emphasis – but timing most of all. Of course the best stand-up comics make it look totally natural, but behind that appearance of ease lies a lot of hard practice.

Section 1: Activity 4

1. Responses will vary. It seems clear that Nordheimer believes Johnson to be at least in part a victim – a victim of the war in Vietnam, a victim of the racial inequities of his society, and a victim of those who exploited him after he became a “hero.” Nordheimer wants to draw these issues to his readers’ attention; perhaps he believes that by speaking out about such problems in his society he’ll help pave the way for change.

Other ideas?

2. a. There were probably a few allusions to things or people with which you weren’t familiar. Here are some that students sometimes ask about:
- N.A.A.C.P. stands for National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, an American civil rights group founded in 1909 that works at ending discrimination against minority groups.
 - The Ho Chi Minh Trail was a network of trails created by the North Vietnamese during the war in Vietnam to supply their forces in South Vietnam. The United States put a great deal of effort into trying to cut off supplies by destroying the trail, but new routes always appeared whenever an old one had to be abandoned. The trail was named after Ho Chi Minh, president of North Vietnam from 1954 to 1969.
 - The Communist Tet offensive was an offensive launched by the North Vietnamese against major cities in South Vietnam, especially the capital, Saigon. It began in 1968 and, though it ultimately failed, shocked the United States into rethinking their role in the war in Vietnam.
 - The Pentagon is a large building that serves as headquarters for the U.S. Department of Defense. It derives its name from its five-sided shape.

The essay contains other allusions and expressions that most Canadians, because of our familiarity with U.S. culture, would probably know – for example *R and R*, *M.P.*, *G.I.*, *AWOL* and references to Presidents Nixon, Kennedy, and Johnson. Readers from other cultures might find some of these references very obscure.

- b. Responses will vary, but it's unlikely that any of the essay's allusions would have hindered your comprehension of the work. This is not always the case, however. Writers who mistakenly assume too much knowledge on the part of their readers often produce works that readers find obscure and frustrating.
3. A careful examination of Nordheimer's essay reveals that he has, in fact, very much impressed his own interpretations on the facts. The bare facts are simply that a man who fought in the war in Vietnam was killed several years later holding up a store at gunpoint, but readers are left with no doubt in Nordheimer's essay that this man was himself a victim. This is the conclusion Nordheimer makes sure they reach.

Examples of the writer's "colouring" are everywhere. Here's a typical example taken from the first few paragraphs:

Born out of wedlock when his mother was a teenager and raised on public welfare, he had been the good boy on his block in the dreary housing project, an altar boy and Explorer Scout, one of the few among the thousands of poor black youngsters in Detroit who had struggled against the grinding life of the ghetto and broken free, coming home from Vietnam tall and strong and a hero.

Obviously this sort of writing goes far beyond simply reporting the facts.

In fact, it's not difficult to imagine a similar essay, selectively using the same set of facts, painting a very different picture of Johnson. Here was a soldier who gained fame by going berserk and killing people, who carried around colour photographs of dead Vietnamese, who made few attempts at finding jobs, who went heavily into debt, and who died while committing an armed robbery. Clearly a very different essay could be written about Dwight Johnson.

4. Responses may vary slightly.
- a. Johnson is likely tortured psychologically by his experiences in the war.
 - b. Johnson must have developed some serious psychological problems caused by the killing in which he took part. Does he enjoy the photos, or is he perhaps using them to try to come to terms with what he's done? This is one of the few details that Nordheimer leaves up to his readers to interpret.
 - c. Johnson is obviously tortured by his memories, brought on by the ceremony. Is he crying for his dead comrades, because of the horror he witnessed and took part in, or for some other reason?
 - d. These companies are interested only in using Johnson – probably for public relations purposes. An anonymous black ex-G.I. was of no use to them.
 - e. This is another indication of the stress Johnson is experiencing. It's affecting him physically.
5. Responses will be personal. The question here isn't whether Nordheimer has interpreted the facts, but whether his interpretation is fair and defensible. Certainly Nordheimer includes observations made by many people who knew Johnson. Though one can expect that the testimony of family members and close friends may be somewhat biased, Nordheimer builds an impressive case for Johnson with the many complimentary comments he elicits from people who encountered Johnson in a wide variety of situations.

But does he take the notion of Johnson as victim too far? When this essay was written, people were just beginning to realize the vast extent to which such things as poverty, alienation, racial tensions, and violence pave the way for later criminal activity. Today, with so many people claiming victimhood, the pendulum seems to be swinging the other way; more and more people are insisting that factors like these are no excuse for denying individuals' responsibility for their own behaviour. In evaluating anything you read, it's very hard to step out of your own time and see the issue from a broader perspective; but it's something you should try to do.

Section 1: Follow-up Activities

Extra Help

1. Were you able successfully to adopt someone else's viewpoint? Did trying to do this help you see situations from a broader perspective? If you tried question c., did you find it fun to tell the story from the villain's viewpoint?
2. a. and b. Were you able to project enthusiasm? Could you liven up a dull topic simply by talking about it in an enthusiastic way? Of course if you really weren't interested in the topic, this exercise has an element of artificiality about it, but it's still good practice in trying to get right into a topic and conveying your involvement.
3. There is no suggested answer for this question.

Enrichment

There are no suggested answers for this activity.

Section 2: Activity 1

- 1., 2., 3. There are no suggested answers for these questions.
4. a. Responses will vary somewhat, but the essay's thesis seems to be that in Jamaica relations between blacks and whites are open and natural. There's an equality between the two races lacking in other countries.
- b. Hendricks has set up his essay as a narrative, told in chronological order.
5. a. Responses will vary somewhat, but in essence the essay's thesis is that Margaret Laurence was a woman of admirable qualities. She possessed great strength of character, firmness of convictions, and courage.
b. Findley uses the four lines of a poem with which his essay opens to organize the piece. He discusses Margaret Laurence's qualities of firmness, fierceness, and courage in the order dictated by these lines.
- 6., 7., 8. There are no suggested answers for these questions.
9. Examples, of course, will vary. Here are examples with which to compare your own passages:
a. If you read some or all of Dylan Thomas's "A Child's Christmas in Wales," you no doubt turned to this essay for an example of vivid imagery. Almost any passage would do, like this one from the opening paragraph:

All the Christmases roll down toward the two-tongued sea, like a cold and headlong moon bundling down the sky that was our street; and they stop at the rim of the ice-edged, fish-freezing waves, and I plunge my hands in the snow and bring out whatever I can find. In goes my hand into that wool-white bell-tongued ball of holidays resting at the rim of the carol-singing sea, and out come Mrs. Prothero and the firemen.

If you didn't read this essay, you'd have had a harder time finding examples of vivid imagery. Here's one short example from Margaret Laurence's "A Place to Stand On":

I doubt if I will ever live there again, but those poplar bluffs and the blackness of that soil and the way in which the sky is open from one side of the horizon to the other – these are things I will carry inside my skull for as long as I live

Here's another from Doris Lessing's "My Father":

Soon, there was my father in a cigar-shaped house of thatch and mud on the top of a kopje that overlooked in all directions a great system of mountains, rivers, valleys, while overhead the sky arched from horizon to empty horizon. . . . Our neighbours were four, five, seven miles off. In front of the house . . . no neighbours, nothing; no farms, just wild bush with two rivers but no fences to the mountains seven miles away. And beyond these mountains and bush again to the Portuguese border, over which "our boys" used to escape when wanted by the police for pass or other offences.

- b. Here's a simile taken from the opening sentence of Ellen Goodman's "A Celebration of the Emotions":

This week, when madness came east in repeated bulletins, like weather reports of a western blizzard . . .

Here's a metaphor taken from the same essay – in this case the kind of metaphor called *personification*:

Reason advises people to reduce the risks of their life. Reason is cautious in the face of change. Reason cannot really imagine the depths of feeling and connection that come with childbirth, the way in which the palette of human emotions opens up from primary colours to a vast and subtle rainbow. Reason can only think of diapers.

- c. Here's an example of parallelism taken from Woody Allen's "My Speech to the Graduates":

He has seen the ravages of war, he has known natural catastrophes, he has been to singles bars.

(Note how the equal weight given the three clauses by their parallel structure contrasts ironically with the difference in importance the reader perceives the three things to have in reality.)

- d. Here's a periodic sentence taken from the first page of "From Dakto to Detroit: Death of a Troubled Hero":

Four and one-half hours later, on an operating table at Detroit General Hospital, Dwight (Skip) Johnson died from five gunshot wounds.

- e. An example of an interrogative sentence, taken from a paragraph from "My Speech to the Graduates" (which contains twelve interrogative sentences) is

Is this science?

- f. An exclamatory sentence, taken from "Seasons in the Rain," is

Why, the man was a *Conservative*!

- g. An example of a short paragraph, taken from "Mind Must Be the Firmer" is

The fierceness in her was mighty.

- h. Here are a long and short sentence juxtaposed, taken from Timothy Findley's "Mind Must Be the Firmer." Note that the second sentence is a minor sentence; it isn't in itself a complete independent clause. However, Findley presents it as a full sentence to increase its impact. (For a discussion of major and minor sentences, see the Extra Help for this section.)

The onslaught of fictional men and women, ideas, and events – all of whom and all of which can achieve their existence only if the writer succeeds at giving them articulation – has a strange, seductive power to suggest that articulation "cannot be achieved." Unless you are firm.

- i. There are, of course, many interesting and unusual constructions in the essays you've read. A good example is Timothy Findley's use of these minor sentences to divide up his discussion:

Fierce, fiercer, fiercest.
Brave, braver, bravest.

10. and 11. There are no suggested answers for these questions.

Section 2: Activity 2

1. Responses will, of course, vary greatly. Here's one rewritten paragraph with which to compare your own. Note how this paragraph has achieved unity.

Last winter we finished our basement so I could move down there. We began by framing the walls; that was a job Dad and I did together. Then Mum did the wiring, and I put in the fibreglass insulation – an easy job, but an itchy one. Next came putting up the drywall and the taping, mudding, and sanding that goes along with that job. Mum and Dad did most of it together, but Dad did the sanding because the dust is bad for Mum's asthma. Drywalling's a tricky job, but it turned out pretty nicely. I painted the walls myself – a soft off-white colour – and Dad and Mum put down the linoleum. We still haven't installed a suspended ceiling, so I'm living with all the joists and wires and insulation exposed; but we'll get around to it one of these days.

You may have deleted a bit more extraneous information in your rewritten paragraphs – references, perhaps to the mother's asthma or the itchiness of fibreglass insulation. To some degree these are stylistic choices; a looser, more conversational style admits of a bit more unnecessary information; it can add interest and a personal touch. The thing is to be aware of your style, purpose, and audience and to strive for unity in your writing within that context.

2. Again responses will vary greatly. Here's one paragraph that's been rewritten to increase its coherence. Compare it with your own.

English is the world's richest language. Other languages, for example, don't even have such a thing as a thesaurus because they have far fewer synonyms than English. The reason our language has so many synonyms is its heavy borrowing from other tongues – a result of its history. The roots of English go back to the Germanic Saxon language, which gave us most of our concise, one-syllable words with strong consonant sounds – words like *war*, *book*, and *cow*. Then in the seventh century, the Vikings invaded England, bringing with them their own language. Many Viking words entered our vocabulary, most notably words with the "sk" sound like *skirt* and *sky*. Finally, in 1066 the French-speaking Normans conquered England, and after that for centuries all the nobility spoke French. Eventually, however, noblemen adopted English, and French died out. By this time, though, many French words had entered the language. On top of this, English has absorbed many Latin and Greek terms – especially for use in the sciences. The result is that English is a very rich tongue, and English speakers can often express shades of meaning unavailable to those who speak other languages.

3. Responses will vary. Compare yours to these:

- a. When the moose stepped into the road, Jean-Luc screeched to a stop.
- b. Old Mrs. Swensen tackled the purse snatcher right on the sidewalk.
- c. To live is to work and to work is to live: that's my motto.
- d. One of the rules of this school is that no one can park in the bus lane.

4. Responses, of course, will vary. Compare your ideas with what follows:

Drug Use Among Track and Field Athletes	
Topics	Approximate Number of Words
• a brief history of track and field events	0
• the principal track and field events	0
• the factors that lead to drug use by track and field athletes	600
• training techniques of modern athletes	0
• nutritional needs of athletes	0
• the principal drugs used by track and field athletes	800
• tests used to determine drug use	400
• possible side effects of drugs	400
• problems of enforcing drug rules	400
• the drug problems in other sports	0
• suggestions for dealing with the problem	<u>400</u>
Total number of words	3000

5. Responses will vary. Compare yours to these:

- a. We can predict medical improvements for the developing world.
- b. Rap music has a very powerful beat.
- c. An inadequate education can ruin people lives.
- d. The strange object was ten feet tall and fourteen feet around.
- e. They worked hard all day to repair the devastating damage of the fire.
- f. The ripe tomato was soft and bright red.
- g. After his election defeat, Helmut thought it was time to quit.
- h. While practising his saxophone, Jan heard an unusual noise.
- i. Our environment creates ideas within us that influence everything we do.
- j. People noticed that Colette was absent.
- k. Elliot couldn't keep a secret.
- l. We left in a hurry because it had started to rain.
- m. Until people start to care about others, big cities will have slums.
- n. Ashley and Beth are acquainted, I believe.
- o. All the acreage owners except the Olsons haul their garbage to the dump.

6. and 7. There are no suggested answers for these questions.

Section 2: Follow-up Activities

Extra Help

1. Responses may vary somewhat, but should be much like these:
 - a. Winter having come late that year, we had a barbecue on Christmas Day.
 - b. Kaitlin is always wrapped up in herself without any regard for others.
 - c. I have two reasons for going: to meet new people and to get some exercise.
 - d. The horse ran faster and faster, her mane swept back and her nostrils flaring.
 - e. correct
 - f. Ted having won the prize, everyone in his class felt vindicated.
 - g. We talked to the scientist, who's convinced there's life on other planets.
 - h. I'm walking down the street when all at once this guy jumps me.
 - i. correct
 - j. correct (two minor sentences)
2.
 - a. No one told me that the plane was early; therefore I wasn't at the airport to meet her.
 - b. I don't much like being at the lake; it's getting there that I enjoy.
 - c. There was nothing there; everything looked untouched.
 - d. I enjoy playing soccer; however, I find baseball boring.
 - e. We set sail at daybreak. The wind had died down and the clouds had dissipated.

Note that in each of the first four sentences, the semicolon could be correctly replaced with a period. In the last sentence, the period could be replaced with a semicolon. If you're unclear on how to use semicolons, look them up in your handbook.

3. Responses will vary; compare yours to these:
 - a. Before his brother had a chance to withdraw his offer, Azim accepted it.
 - b. Seldom had Grace played the cello as well as she did that evening.
 - c. Up through the clouds floated the hot-air balloon.
 - d. An unusually talented writer, Leo has had several of his stories published already.
 - e. Never before had I seen such reprehensible behaviour.

4. Responses will vary. Compare the effectiveness of your wordings with the sentences that follow.
- a. He hoped to avoid his pain and grief.
 - b. The novel *Lord of the Flies* concerns a group of boys who revert to savagery.
 - c. Anna felt grateful for the opportunity of a good education.
 - d. Because I was late, I made a phone call.
 - e. At this time the answer is simply no.
 - f. The fire chief surprised us by proving that a pyromaniac had caused the tragedy.
 - g. Three people came to the party.
 - h. Upon receiving a yes, he went to the bulletin board.
 - i. Mr. Tymchuk was buried on Friday, three days after he died.
 - j. Because we may run short, please count the number of pencils in the classroom.

Enrichment

There are no suggested answers for this activity.

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